

This Is Not My Life

JODY SALERNO

L'auteure raconte son expérience face aux abus physiques et sexuels dans son enfance et à l'âge adulte.

I am thirteen years old. Three years younger than my last daughter.

I am at The Children's Aid receiving centre, Armah House. I have been beaten, blue-eyed BLACK, by my father while my brother held me down and my mother watched.

My sister hid in silence, waiting for it to be over. Waiting until she could spoon me close and hold me tight.

The beating was worse than usual. They had to bring me to the doctor. He called the Children's Aid Society while my parents sat in the waiting room. They watched while the Children's Aid Society child protection worker walked beside me, right by them and out of the doctor's office.

This is not my life. How could she just watch?

I was probed, prodded, and policed 24/7 by punitive house "mothers" as though I had done something wrong. Not permitted to leave the property for fear I would run and then my Lorne Park "daddy" wouldn't pay. They refused my pleas to have my father charged with assault. "You are out of control."

This is not my life. How could she just watch?

I am seventeen and living at Covenant House. The social worker, Patrick, liked me, special. He tells me how smart I am. He tells me how sexy I am. Patrick wakes me up early for school. I study at Sheridan College in the upgrading program. I dropped out of "high" (oh so, so high) school in grade nine. The infinitely wise school board told me I had dyslexia and would never succeed. "Good thing you are pretty 'gurl' dear."

Patrick had polio. His calves are so thin and tiny. He smells like smoke. Patrick fucks me and tells me how special I am. Special and pretty I am.

This is not my life. How could she just watch?

I am nineteen. The test is positive; my baby will come

in August. I have no idea who the father is and I don't really care. I will be loved and I will love/mommy as I deserved to be loved/mommied.

I laboured for three days, split open from ass to cunt. My son was born of the violence from forceps, the evidence of his struggle deeply embedded onto each side of his tiny head. Three bags of blood later I was told he had been sent to Sick Children's Hospital. I refused the transfusion for as long as I could. I began to feel my body grow cold before I submitted. The bags of blood were free of HIV or Hep.

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My son, the source of my recovery, is the reason I survived. My son alive and thriving. I am the mother I would have chosen to mother me.

I am 21 and pregnant with my daughter. I am sitting in the examination room of Women's College Hospital across from a woman who sends me home to consider my choices before making a decision to terminate my pregnancy. I choose to have my daughter and move in with her father.

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I am 23 and having my last daughter. There is barely any semblance of me left. I am the living dead and he is the father of three amazing children and the director of an Open Custody Facility.

This is not my life. How could she just watch?

In 2002 I chose life. I escaped.

Shunned and as beaten blue-eyed BLACK as I was at thirteen.

I escaped.

If I had died as a result of my abused and neglected self I would have been honoured as a wonderful mother and wife. But, I didn't die.

I live. I live with the hatred of the world's judgment perpetrated onto women who chose to live authentically, in truth and visible.

This is my life and you have just watched.

I know now mommy, I know why you could only watch.

Jody Salerno is a Queer, Femme, feminist, Italian Mother of three, Grandmother of one and Other Mother to several. She is a Trans ally and former Sex Worker. She has worked within the hostel, shelter, and social service settings for 21 years. Currently, she is the manager of a shelter for women, children, and youth escaping violence. She is also completing her undergraduate degree in Women's Studies at York University.

LINDA FRANK

Miscarriage

Henry Ford Hospital, 1932

The hospital bed is a raft she floats
over a dun coloured plane
Blood stained sheets against a deserted
Detroit horizon, pewter gray sky

This kind of loss is like no other
It tosses her naked through inarticulate
space
Grief. A desolate stare. One amplified tear
slides down her cheek. Her belly
still swollen with the missing child

She can barely grip the artery-red reins
of sorrow that yoke her
to the harrowing symbols she paints
Her lost fetus. Her broken pelvis
salmon-red torso and damaged spine
The snail slow abortion. The machine grip
of pain and Diego's gift, the bruise coloured
orchid

On her mantle she keeps
a fetus in a bottle of formaldehyde
Tells everyone
it's her own stillborn child

Linda Frank grew up in Montreal but has been living in Hamilton, Ontario since 1977. She teaches social science at Mohawk College. Her work has been widely published in journals and anthologies across Canada. Her first collection of poetry called Cobalt Moon Embrace was released in 2002 from BuschekBooks. These poems are from a manuscript seeking a publisher on Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, called Kahlo: The World Split Open.

JANE TASKER

The Blind Mirror

To be myself (I note) I need the illumination of other people's eyes and therefore cannot be entirely sure, what is myself.

—Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*

The mirror was not always blind.
When you first brought it home,
Its trinity of glass surfaces,
Arched and bevelled,
Shone
With the depth of silver.

It limned us so sharply then
—the man, the woman, the boy—
Held within the narrow and burnished
frame
Carved with small, dense roses
(I saw no gargoyles then).

The first scratch was a superficial one:
Perhaps some grit of cast sand caused it,
Or perhaps a child's makeshift sword
Swung lightly, recklessly through the air,
Glanced its tip across the mirrored surface
As if over the filmed retina of an eye.

There were other abuses:
A moon-shaped nick,
Like the imprint of a fingernail,
Left by a flung teacup;
A dulled edge along the bevel
Where you rested your head
On the sleeve of your coarse tweed jacket,
Telling me you were worn down, abraded.

We kept secrets.
Love was offered, withheld.
We sought ourselves in the eyes of the other's
reflection.

I saw you look through me and past.

Jane Tasker graduated from York University with an Honours B.A., summa cum laude and an Honours M.A. and is currently teaching Elements of Writing Style at Ryerson University. She is indebted to her mentors: Dr. Frances Beer, Dr. John Unnau, and Dr. Naomi Diamond.