



A True Tale of Backdoor Abuse, Dark Secrets & Other Evil Deeds

Kathleen Hoy Foley

FIRST WORDS



I will speak
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I will speak
I will speak

I. will. SPEAK. **OUT LOUD.**

ouch. ouch. ouch.

step by step

KATHLEEN HOY FOLEY



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PROLOGUE



Family Secrets

I am a storyteller. From a long line of storytellers, I'd like to say. But that's not true. I'm a storyteller from a family of secret keepers who bury their secrets as they do their dead. Gone, then forgotten. Generation after generation trapped by monsters that roam the past, feeding on whispers and shame. A family where the actions of heroes are swallowed up by the deeds of the despicable or the disgrace of the unfortunate. There is no separation. It is all unspoken. The mysteries do not start anywhere, because they are everywhere.

A storyteller thrives on stories — both the hearing and the telling of them — and I longed to be connected to my relatives and ancestors by their tales of sorrows and triumphs. I yearned to feel the blood of their history flowing somewhere in my veins, however good or bad; to be connected to them, from the garden-variety do-not-tells to the heartwrenchingly unspeakable. I wanted my mother, my father, my uncles and aunts and grandparents to open their mouths, discard their silence, and speak. I wanted to sit at their feet and listen to the glorious and messy details of how family history shaped them, steered them to their homes, to their spouses, into their lives. Especially the Evans clan. My mother's people. People that die with their secrets untold.

Why did my grandmother take up a sledgehammer and slam it into the front-room fireplace? Was it my grandfather's drinking that drove her to destroy? A particularly nasty case of PMS? The onset of the tropical heat of menopause? Was she bored with life in the useless town of Fieldsboro? What? No one said. With a bit of a chuckle, the story would wither after the first sentence. But I needed more. I had to see the sleeves of my grandmother's dress pull against fat and muscle as she swung that hammer, smashing brick



after brick, crumbling them into a pile of dust. I wanted to hear her grunts, smell the pulverized rubble, and peer into her eyes to see the flash of anger. Was it before or after the living-room makeover that she jumped in my Aunt Bobby's car and took off with her eldest daughter to the sunshine belt to start a new life, leaving behind young children, never to return? Were it not for the car crash and the steering wheel that ended up embedded in her stomach — causing cancer to all her female parts, including her breasts, as the whispers went — maybe my grandmother wouldn't have been carted back into the life she was obviously frantic to leave.

Then there were those letters. "Put them in your shoe, Patsy. Don't tell Daddy, Patsy." At five years old, my mother had to collect them from the post office down the alley and up the street a ways, straight across from Aunt Nellie's clapboard hovel attached to the borough saloon where the local forlorn traded their futures for hooch. Letters my mother wore stuffed inside her shoes until my grandmother untied the laces and pulled out the contraband sometime after dark, when the house was quiet and my grandfather was good-enough drunk. Who wrote them? What did they say? *I don't know, Kathleen; you ask too many questions.*

One time I saw pictures of my grandmother and grandfather gathered with friends — grainy photographs of giggling girls with mussed-up bobbed hair and long, baggy dresses, and boys with their straw bowlers cocked on their heads, dressed in wrinkled seersucker and looking as if they'd just had a tussle. They must have been snapped thousands of years before I would have ever recognized them. Defying social decorum like any teenager ever born, they were draped all over each other, their bawdy behavior frozen on film for all time, exuding an aura of sexuality. I remember being uncomfortable looking at them, shocked that those people from all those years ago who in some way belonged to me were not just the staid personalities of my imagination, devoid of fun and sin. Those pictures looked like the beginnings of secrets.

Years before I was born in the late forties, Great Uncle Russ, my maternal grandfather's brother, fell so deep into pornography that authorities railroaded him out of Florida with warnings never to return. Who wouldn't want to know more about a relative that had drifted so far from decency?



But by the time I came around, all that was left were the whispers. *Kathleen, I don't know; I don't remember.* Even Uncle Paul, my mother's brother, his imminent death thwarted by a lucky Catholic missal in his pocket when a German bullet slammed into his chest, carried this incident as a secret so barely voiced that his own daughter never heard it. *But didn't it hurt? What about all those bullets whizzing over his head—weren't they loud? Wasn't he scared? Did any of his buddies get killed? Kathleen. Kathleen.*

I wanted their history. But no one would ever tell, keeping their lips as tight as their purses, gathering their stories and shutting them away where no eyes could peek. Just as they stuffed cash into old cans, hoarding pennies and dimes out of sight lest a thief might happen by and steal the milk money. But my family's silence didn't stop my questions, and when I knew better than to ask, I kept my ears perked, just in case a morsel would fall my way. That's how I found out about my great grandparents' divorce.

In the days when marriages were set in cement, Nanny and Jessie, my mother's grandparents, broke convention and social pressure and divorced. In a tiny town of churchgoers, scandals didn't get any bigger than that. Not that I know the details, mind you. But I do know that Nanny moved to Florida with the dastardly Great Uncle Russ, presumably before he was evicted from the Sunshine State. *Why? What happened? Nanny didn't have anything to do with Uncle Russ's side job, did she?* Jessie, blind and deaf by this time, lived out his life with my mother's folks, killing time whittling and crafting dollhouses and cradles for my cousins and me. *But he was blind; how did he do that? Kathleen, you're making my head hurt.*

Nanny, weighing no more than a pound of butter at birth and kept warm in a box in the oven, barely grew to four foot five. I wanted to know about the power in that mini body. And why with all her spunk, she chose to live out her days with her boy Russ in a dingy apartment in a backdoor suburb of Trenton, New Jersey, a million miles from the glitz and bustle of Miami, sitting at the kitchen table and staring out the window at rundown storefronts. Given his past, Uncle Russ, a photographer by trade, had to have a darkroom full of obscene material. Did Nanny just ignore her son's foolish pastime? By the time I was old enough to question, Nanny was too deaf to hear and I was too afraid to ask.





Consider Kathleen Hoy Foley among the rare writers engaged in the process of creating serious literature. Writers, as observers, who do not turn away, but look and look again at those things that are most difficult, and push the boundaries of the spoken word to articulate the unspeakable.

Woman In Hiding: A True Tale of Backdoor Abuse, Dark Secrets & Other Evil Deeds rises from the 1960s, a time when girls did not own rights to their bodies and no social or legal definitions existed for acquaintance rape.

Impregnated by a rapist posing as a “boyfriend,” Kathleen was socially and religiously condemned and shunted away to a home for unwed mothers to hide the evidence of her sins. The guaranteed confidential adoption process was the lifeline that allowed teenaged Kathleen to believe that her mutilating ordeal was over. But people have a way of betraying secrets, even after 30 years, and certain strangers won’t stop the hunt until they destroy what never belonged to them.

Ambushed by the recurrence of the crippling trauma from her past, Kathleen was left with two choices: speak or be destroyed. Kathleen chose to speak.

Kathleen Hoy Foley, along with her husband, Phil, founded WomanInHiding.org. Originally created as an aid for hunted women and to advocate for the rights of privacy for every girl/woman rescued by a confidential adoption, the site has since expanded its focus to explicitly address the unseen, lifelong consequences of sexual violence. A staggering one in four girls is sexually assaulted by age 18. Most sexual assaults are committed by someone the girl knows and go unreported.

Kathleen also initiated the social art project, SILENCED WOMEN SPEAK, an anonymous means for silenced women to have their voices heard.

Woman In Hiding: A True Tale of Backdoor Abuse, Dark Secrets & Other Evil Deeds has been compared to *The Liar’s Club*, Mary Karr’s tour de force. *Woman in Hiding* is witty, lyrical, angry, bitingly ironic, and inspiring without being sentimental. A riveting read.

