



by Robin Lynn Brooks with trauma specialist Dr. AnDréya Wilde

For all participants of the Economic Justice Summit, June 8, 2016, Smith College:

I have now written *The Blooming of the Lotus for Professionals*, a companion book to my poetic memoir *The Blooming of the Lotus: a spiritual journey from trauma into light*. The original book, written in collaboration with Dr. AnDréya Wilde, is for both survivors and professionals. This new volume, also written with Dr. Wilde, is expressly for professionals, for those who impact the lives of survivors of childhood incest and/or sexual abuse.

The Special Introduction to *The Blooming of the Lotus for Professionals* begins with an address that I made to the Northwestern District Attorney's Office in Greenfield, MA, on March 24, 2016, included in this hand-out. This address is followed in the book by more information about the repercussions of being a survivor, as well as specific recommendations for therapists, healers, educators, the medical profession, judges, and supporters of survivors.

The *Foreword* and *Preface* from the original book also appear in *The Blooming of the Lotus for Professionals*, as well as a grouping of poems from the original that, though much-abbreviated, still gives a sense of the narrative of my story and the progression of my healing journey.

The full Special Introduction does not by any means include all repercussions for survivors. These are simply ones that have come to mind over these last years that I have made note of and felt important to share.

I thank you for your valuable time and consideration in reviewing this material.

Robin Lynn Brooks
May 2016

“I DESERVE” and RESILIENCY

Address to the Domestic Violence Task Force, Greenfield, MA

March 24, 2016

I have written the poetic memoir *The Blooming of the Lotus: a spiritual journey from trauma into light* about the process of my own healing from the brutality of my childhood. I want to speak to you today about how childhood incest and/or sexual abuse can deeply affect a woman’s life in all aspects — for herself and within the dynamics of all of her relationships. I then want to talk about what can help.

When I speak about my book today, I am not here to give a sales pitch. When, over five years, I wrote the hundreds of poems that I wrote for my own healing, I did not need to share them with others. I chose to do so because I felt they might help other survivors. Also, I wanted supporters and professionals who impact survivors’ lives to understand more about what it means to be a survivor, in hopes of effecting change. I talk about my book because I want to spread the word about ways to help survivors hope and heal.

When a girl is sexually abused by her father or by someone she knows, loves, and/or trusts, her self-worth is severely diminished. Especially if this happens repeatedly, or for a long period of time, she can feel obliterated, and she no longer feels she deserves to be treated well, with boundaries, kindness, and respect.

When a relationship is not abusive, a girl develops a deep inner knowing that her father or another loves her and cares for her. But with abuse, confusion permeates her life, and she loses her ability to trust in others and in herself.

A survivor then tends later on to draw towards her what is familiar, and that tends to involve people who hurt her. Believing herself to be worthless, she also believes this is only what she deserves. Why else would her father or that other person have hurt her as a child?

Unfortunately, without conscious awareness, she then continues the abuse by drawing to her abusive relationships later in her life.

To stop this cycle of abuse, the survivor needs to learn she does have worth and she does deserve to have kindness, appropriateness, and goodness in relationship.

My book, *The Blooming of the Lotus*, can be a first step on this journey. It is there for the survivor who is in isolation. It is there in the absence of a therapist and helps far more *with* a therapist's guidance. Written by a survivor of extreme childhood abuse—myself—it speaks to a survivor's soul. As a survivor reads, she is able to recognize herself. She can feel in the clear, intimate words her own feelings of worthlessness, despair, her own confusion and feelings of annihilation.

In beginning this book, first and foremost, a survivor learns that she is not the first person to feel this way, that *she is not alone*. Then, as she continues to read, in the small number of words of each poem—reading only one poem at a time, or a whole chapter that resonates with where she is in the moment—she can gradually begin to unravel her own feelings and experiences.

Once there is awareness that others have had experiences like hers, at some point in her healing, a crucial step is to “tell” someone what happened to her. The “telling” is of utmost importance to her healing.

When the survivor “tells,” she begins to crack open the thick walls she has built around herself for fear of being hurt. She is admitting that she needs help and is taking the risk to let in the first thin rays of hope.

The first person I told was my therapist. It took me years of telling her before I was ready to tell a friend. Then, I told many, many people as I published my book, *The Blooming of the Lotus*, and even began speaking to audiences about it.

After “telling” one person, finding a group of people who share a survivor's experiences is truly a means of facilitating healing. The best group is one in which the other members have also suffered similar childhood trauma. We are lucky, locally, to have places locally like the Salasin Center in Greenfield and The Women's Center at MCSM in Turners Falls. Having facilitators who are completely trauma-informed or therapists experienced with this type of trauma who have clinical training in this arena is crucial.

I first found the Salasin Center through a workshop called “Women's Nourishment for the Soul,” offered at the Art Garden in Shelburne Falls in conjunction with the Salasin. For the first time in my life, through art and writing, I was opening up and sharing some of my true self. Over time, first in a writing program and then an art program at the Salasin, I slowly came out of isolation. Then, as I wrote in *Peer-to-Peer Writing*, I saw that my writing helped other women, and I was encouraged to collect my poems and put them into a book to help other survivors.

After coming out of isolation, learning what it means to say, “I deserve,” is key. A survivor has to learn how to give to herself in simple ways—five minutes of rest, a pat on the back for accomplishing something small, maybe even just getting up in the morning (which can be huge), a pink ribbon, a walk in nature—and then big ways, like choosing not to go to a gathering that will not support her, or opting to say *No* to a friend.

The more a survivor is able to go inward, listen hard, give to herself, and honor herself for what she needs, the more she begins to learn what this feels like in her body. The more she comes to recognize this feeling and how good it feels, the more she begins to use her body as a compass for what is right and healthy for her. She eventually draws towards herself people and situations that are healthy for her.

As she continues to do this, she comes to see that being violated is totally unacceptable, even though this is familiar and, therefore, “normalized” in many forms in her life, particularly emotionally. In time, she is able to gather her strength and courage to seek help.

The Blooming of the Lotus and programs for women in environments which are completely trauma-informed can model ways for a survivor to empower herself, thus helping her move towards her own healing and self-worth.

My own story begins with being brutally incested, violated, and tortured by my father from infancy until the age of 17 when I finally found the courage to say, “No!” My mother watched or walked away, and blamed me.

As a survivor reads *The Blooming of the Lotus*, she watches this woman—me—who was so badly abused, go through many different phases of healing, some of which I have spoken of here. A survivor reading my story becomes witness to, and at the same time lives *within this* woman, who “tells,” comes out of isolation, joins groups, learns to honor herself, and comes to believe she *can* have goodness and fulfillment in her life. A survivor begins to take into her own body the essence and feeling of what it means to deserve to live her own life.

The survivor goes on to further witness how, at the end, this woman has let go of her demons and stands with her feet planted on the earth and her arms outstretched to all she believes in, including herself.

In *The Blooming of the Lotus*, the survivor is not told what to do in step-by-step directions. Each woman needs to find the way that is right for her. In my book, she is given examples of possible steps and inspiration to follow them. Most importantly, a kernel of her own self-worth has been planted within her, borrowed perhaps from that of the woman in my poems.

My fervent desire is that a survivor receives hope from this and learns that it is her birthright to be treated with kindness and with respect for her boundaries. Perhaps from the identification with my experiences, she can begin to question the pattern of abuse that might be occurring in her life, including being abused by her partner or others.

Over time she learns she has the right to have appropriateness from every relationship she is in, from partner to friend to parent to child to employer. She also learns that it IS possible to heal from the deepest darkness out into the light and to the fulfillment of who she is. She learns, too, that she can have love without having to “pay a price” to have it.

I have included here a short grouping of poems from the original book in order to share the feelings that are experienced by most survivors and then what the healing process entails.

Again, I very much appreciate your time and consideration.

Poems Included Here:

“My heart moves...” (the first poem in the book)

“Return from the Dead”

“Three Years Old”

“Who I Can Be”

Poems Included for Economic Justice Summit participants

(No poems here include any material of a graphic nature,
nor are there any poems included from the most difficult chapters.)

The first poem in the book, from Part One – the story of what happened

My heart moves
to the sound
of tears not fallen,
waiting for the emptiness
to find its river out.
The hollow drum
of my insides
echoes
with the warning
of a hurt so deep,
I am lost.
Effigies of horror
burned,
I tear at my skin
so the blood runs,
so I may feel this pain
and let the weeping begin.
At least then
I will know myself
alive.

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Part Two follows the progress of the major portion of my healing as I gather to me the healing tools of writing, art, nature, self-nurturing, and my belief system – from the Chapter Healing:

RETURN FROM THE DEAD

She is here with me
now,
the ten-year-old
who died so long ago,
having flown
from her body,
unable to suffer
any longer
the torture.

Slowly
she returns to life.
Slowly
comes from numbness
to breathe again
but in ragged breaths
still.

Lips and fingers blue
begin to get
their color back,
tingling
from rousing
after a long death.
Legs sluggish
feel the flow
of blood
running through them.
Come
from a place
these fifty years
of suspended animation —
frozen
in a capsule of time —
it will take a while
to awaken.

She was harmed
back then
beyond measure.
Activity around her,
sudden sounds
will only
shock her.
Only
the subtle kindness
of love
and gradual company
that has
within it
not one ounce
of maiming
or crowding
can lure her here.

What she needs —
what I need
as I harbor
her frailness —
is quiet
and earth
and muted words
that continue gently
in the lulling
of her waking.

She needs time
before she will sing again
or jump up running
through a field
or whistle
through her untried lips.
She needs time
to gather life
around her
like the cloak
stripped from her
those many years ago.

She needs the warmth
of quiet understanding
and someone listening
to the words
of what befell her.
She needs to hear
again and again
that she can be loved
and will be held
and no one
will hurt her.

When she has had
enough of this,
gradually
she may trust it safe
to live.

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Also, from Part Two, from the Chapter Courage:

THE SHELL

Hesitant,
I stand
at the opening
of the cave
that is the shell
I have carried
with me
all my life.
I have stood
at this threshold
for thirty years,
watching,
listening,
doing
but not yet able
to really step out,
pry myself away
from what
kept me safe
as a child.

In my late twenties
I crawled to the edge
of this shell.
I peered around
and thought it time
to take a chance.
I taught myself
how to talk at parties
instead of lying
on the floor
between a bed
and a wall,
buried in coats
where they were thrown.
But, still,
I realize
I have kept my shell
to hide behind.

Now I am ready —
maybe —
to step forward
away from its cover
an inch at a time,
to open
to at least one
besides the one
who has heard
everything.
To bare my insides
and this utter grief
holding me immobile
and even allow
my body seen
with extra pounds.

To share
that I hurt,
that I can't any more
keep it all inside
for fear of the knife
or the hands
on my throat
or other parts
at other places.
Instead
to hope simply
for love.

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Part Three continues with my healing process as I slowly move out into the light and as I make use of more and more of the healing tools I have gathered – from the Chapter Into the Lotus:

WHO I CAN BE

As I learn
once again
to find the way
that is right for me
to stand
and walk
on this earth,
I let
fall away
how I was forced
to stand
and walk
as a child.

My body
was not my own,
like a river torn
from its natural bed
to bend and twist
according
to the rules of men.

Now,
like the river
when at last
given permission
to follow again
its own authentic course,
I too
am learning
how to make my body
my own.

What
I am doing
these days
is moving me
along this path:

I do something.
I acknowledge
what I do
and that
I do it well.
I breathe this in
and then I rest –
even for a few moments.
I speak to myself
the words
a mother and father
would have spoken,
but not mine.

As I do this ritual,
every time,
I am inviting myself
to be and recognize
who I am.
I am allowing
the fullness of myself
to fill
the space
that I inhabit.
I am feeling
safe enough
to let happen
the growing
and then forming
of who I came here
to be.

The chains
have fallen away.
There is no one
forcing
any more.
There is only
my own voice
claiming
that this
is what I need
and then discovering
in those moments

of breath
and appreciation
and rest
the wholeness
and possibility
of who it is my right
to be.

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All of the above poems are from
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*Robin is currently available for speaking engagements —
including readings, keynotes, lectures, and workshops.
For more information, please visit www.bloomingofthelotus.com.*