



Author Q&A

Your memoir reads like a novel. Why did you write it in third person and how long did it take to finish it?

I wrote it that way for two reasons: first, I prefer reading in third person and I wanted to write a book that I wanted to read. And secondly, it helped me step away from the abuse and write it in a real way that didn't hurt as much.

Girl Hidden is based on memories as well as journals, official documents, and letters that your grandmother kept. These files helped you flesh out your gut-wrenching story. Why do you think your grandmother kept such detailed records?

Grandma knew that someday I would want to know the whole story. She also knew that her daughter, my mother, would make up lies to cover the true version of events, and it was important that I had facts to combat that.

You say you grew up in a purity culture. What exactly is purity culture and how did it affect your daily life? Were there rituals involved?

Purity culture is the Christian mindset that girls are supposed to cover their bodies and stay modest and pure to protect the men who might stumble spiritually because of their beauty. All the responsibility for the men was placed on girls as young as two.

I was required to wear modest clothing – even long dresses until well into my teens. (I got my first pair of pants at sixteen.) I was to treat my stepfather as a safe person to practice being a wife to, from washing his clothes and cleaning up after him to making him lunches to holding hands when we went places to supporting his emotional well-being.

Rituals included a promise ring gifted to me by my stepfather to wear as a wedding ring until he had approved whatever man my mother picked out to be my husband. Dating was out of the question; you had to wait until you got married to have your first physical contact with the man you were marrying (first kiss on your wedding day, that kind of thing) and you were never allowed to be in the same space with your husband-to-be alone until you were wed.

While you were being beaten by your narcissistic mother, she was feeding you religious dogma. What was that about?

As an example, when I was six, I started hoarding candy in my bedroom closet. I was preparing to run away and knew that I would need food when I left. My mother found it, and after a long sermon about why I was going to hell for stealing and why would I want to leave when Jesus had placed me with the Taylors (read: a lot of guilt and shame heaped on my head) I was given thirty swats for stealing and ten for lying, pushing the truth of her words into my backside.

PUBLICITY CONTACT
Gail Kearns

gail@topressandbeyond.com
www.topressandbeyond.com

AUTHOR CONTACT
Jesse Rene Gibbs

Contact@GirlHidden.com

GirlHidden.com



Author Q&A - Continued

When your grandmother learned you were being sexually abused by your stepfather, she came and kidnapped you. How old were you and were you taken against your will? What do you remember most about the incident?

I was six. Grandma told Momma that she was going to drop me off at the private Christian school I was attending and then go to the airport. We stopped at the school, told them that she was taking me home and not to contact the Taylors and left for Washington state. I remember trying so hard not to cry when I left the Taylors; I felt so guilty, like I was in the wrong somehow. And I was leaving my little brothers who I adored.

That a chicken on the farm in the Blue Ridge Mountains where you grew up could steal your heart when you were nine years old is remarkable, given your circumstances. In Girl Hidden, you write about this and other “magical” moments. How were you able to find these small moments of joy?

Living with my grandmother and my aunties when I was the smallest, they taught me to find joy in the smallest of things – from a butterfly on a bush to making cookies. I remember Auntie Mabel waking me up at 4 a.m. one morning to watch the Secret of Nihm on TV and drink eggnog, just because. Also, looking back and really searching for those magical moments as I was writing was really healing.

A pregnant woman your mother brought into your home when you were fourteen had her baby on your bed. How on earth did you deal with that?

It was just life. We had had so many unwed mothers in our home and so many babies coming through our house, it was just part of life. It was hard watching someone so close to my own age going through a pregnancy and losing a child. I remember begging my mother not to ever let her take a baby from me if I got pregnant for some reason. Like, it was super important that she understand from the get-go that I would want to keep my child.

You say that social services were called to your home many, many times. Why didn't they see what was going on and take further action?

Momma had us kids trained to tell only what we had to and only from her version of life. So, when and if we were interviewed, we would protect the family at all costs. No, we were never beaten, we were lovingly spanked a minimum of times and it was rare. No, we were not starved, we always had food. No, we loved being with our parents. None of this was true. It was so hard once I left to unpack all the training that we went through.

I don't understand why they never saw what we were really going through when so many other people did, which is why Social Services was called so often. There were maggots growing in the bottom of our refrigerator, moldy food on the countertops, a filthy home and obviously abused children. I will never understand.

PUBLICITY CONTACT
Gail Kearns

gail@topressandbeyond.com
www.topressandbeyond.com

AUTHOR CONTACT
Jesse Rene Gibbs

Contact@GirlHidden.com

GirlHidden.com



Author Q&A - Continued

You finally managed to escape your mother and stepfather and went to Chicago? Did you have a plan? Where did you end up, and was it a safe haven for you?

I had a plan; I knew I was going to Jesus People USA (JPUSA). I didn't want to end up in a bad situation and I needed to know that a good Christian space would tell me outright if my parents were right and I needed to go home and apologize for leaving. They didn't – they told me that I was safe and that my parents' actions were completely out of line. JPUSA was a much safer space than the one that I had escaped, but it came with its own list of rules and regulations and added a lot of religious traumas to my already traumatized life.

Have you ever heard of the Stockholm syndrome, a coping mechanism to a captive or abusive situation where you develop positive feelings toward your captors/abusers over time? This condition applies to situations including child abuse. Do you identify with this and is it anything you discussed during your eight years of therapy? How so?

Oh totally. One of the key things we worked on was my loss of memory at seven; I lost all my core memories and was only left with the kidnapping and my stepfather's assaults, so I knew that my parents weren't safe people, but I could still function in the world in which I found myself. I started having violent flashbacks in my teens, and to this day a smell or a sound will still trigger a lost memory.

When you left Chicago, you went to Seattle and connected with your best friend. Tell us about how that came about.

Sadly, I had an affair while living at JPUSA, with a man who was married to one of my dearest friends. It was horrible. When it came out that this had been going on, I contacted June and asked to come stay with her. I was so scared and had no money, no way to leave, no contacts outside of the commune. June had known for almost a year that I was unhappy but not how close I had come to suicide during the last year of my marriage. When I called and told her that I had had an affair and needed to leave, she had me on a plane within hours.

She walked me through every aspect of my divorce, starting over, finding a job, getting a car – everything. I don't know what I would have done without her. Especially since the JPUSA community wanted me to stay, get counseling with the man that I had an affair with and his wife and stay with my toxic husband. I can't imagine that I would have survived that situation.

PUBLICITY CONTACT
Gail Kearns

gail@topressandbeyond.com
www.topressandbeyond.com

AUTHOR CONTACT
Jesse Rene Gibbs

Contact@GirlHidden.com

GirlHidden.com



Author Q&A - Continued

Twenty years later, after leaving North Carolina, you stood up to both of your abusers. Was this encouraged by your therapist and what was meeting them like after all those years?

My therapist worked a lot with foster kids, and she told me that foster children need to meet with their bio parents on a regular basis (as long as it's healthy) to see that their parents aren't 1) overgrown monsters or 2) perfect parents that abandoned them. I saw both of my parents as monsters that were trying to get me, to the point that I never felt safe. I was sitting in therapy talking about meeting my mother again and kept getting up to see if she was outside in the hallway listening – I was so scared.

Being in the same room with them again helped me to see that they were just people; large people, yes – my mother towers over me by nearly eight inches and my stepfather was 6' 4". They are large scary people. And seeing them again as an adult did wonders for giving me a feeling of safety. Momma isn't a magical being. She's a sick, twisted human. And I needed to see that for myself.

I was visiting North Carolina to go to my little sister's wedding and visit with all my siblings. I remember standing in the corner holding my precious baby niece while my brothers took turns dancing with my beautiful sister on her wedding day and just sobbing with joy. Everything my mother tried to take from me, I had. I had a relationship with each of my siblings, my grandparents and aunts and cousins – I had a family. She had been summarily kicked out of the family.

You've reunited with your siblings and have a good relationship with all of them now. How do their stories of growing up differ from yours?

We each have our own version of abuse. For a charismatic narcissist, they have certain targets that they focus their attention on. And in my family, it was myself and Noah. We got specific kinds of abuse that the other kids did not. The rest of the kids were pointedly played against us, though they were still mightily abused. Being in the same space with them again has been so healing – just to be able to get a clearer version of each of our stories.

For example, when I left to go to Chicago, my mother told the kids that I left them because they had been bad, that I didn't love them anymore, that I was demon-possessed, etc.; they were told that I was pregnant, had an abortion and was sleeping my way through Chicago. I was told that they didn't want to talk to me, the letters I sent were ripped up and sent back to me and I was not allowed to speak with any of them on the phone. When we got back together and were able to unpack that and clarify the truth of what happened, it was completely magical.

PUBLICITY CONTACT
Gail Kearns

gail@topressandbeyond.com
www.topressandbeyond.com

AUTHOR CONTACT
Jesse Rene Gibbs

Contact@GirlHidden.com

GirlHidden.com



Author Q&A - Continued

If you have one takeaway or cautionary tale for children in abusive situations such as yours, what would that be?

For children, tell your story. Don't stop telling your story until someone listens. For those who are survivors, it's not your fault. You didn't ask for this. And you can heal from it. I promise, it will get better.

PUBLICITY CONTACT
Gail Kearns

gail@topressandbeyond.com
www.topressandbeyond.com

AUTHOR CONTACT
Jesse Rene Gibbs

Contact@GirlHidden.com

GirlHidden.com