

Thanks For Choosing

*Love*

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*The Healing Power of Loving Consciousness*

Elaine Porter

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To Leah Berne, the most loving person I've ever known.

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## *Foreword*

I have changed my name and other names in this book. I felt that maintaining my anonymity was the right thing to do considering some of the revelations I make about my parents. My parents were awful caretakers but I have come to understand why they behaved the way they did. Rather than shame them for not finding the same recovery I have found, I grieve for them that they could not find the same happiness and peace I have.

I also want to state firmly that I do not blame all mothers everywhere for early childhood trauma. Language and biology may give that impression but we are all beholden to the patterns we pick up and they can be wooly-boogers to change as I well know. But good mothering is also fostered by the environment. When that environment fails women, they have to do the best they can. It is also true that Fathers play a role as loving caretakers as well although, biologically, they make a later appearance. Indeed, the greatest irony in this exploration of my early experience was discovering that the love I got as an infant that ultimately saved me was from my father. He just couldn't keep it together for very long. I hope I land my point that I was not a good mother myself for a long time, although I think that I was thankfully good enough in many ways. I had to see that I was treating my children as I had been treated and hate it enough to push through change.

I wrote this book for my thirty-five-year-old self who felt lost and alone in a crowd. I felt ruined for a long time. It was finding the secure and loving relationships with my husband and children that chipped away at my felt sense of ruined-ness and gave me the courage to seek solutions. It was pushing through toxic shame, giving reality some room to breathe, that helped me find the strength to enact those solutions. But I persevered until I got lucky and stumbled onto my path to recovery. This is the most important part of finding peace: You have to actively look for it.

There's a lot of recovery uncovered in this book and a lot more that isn't. I only took one of infinitely many paths. If you are a seeker, take just one idea and explore that. Then come back and get another

one. These ideas will lead to others that I never thought of.  
Stay open. Be willing. Keep moving.

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## *Introduction*

**T**he first working title I gave my autobiography was *I'm OK. Ernie Sucks*, an exposé of all my father's most outrageous behavior. I saw him getting away with his fantasy of the witty, lovable professor and frankly, it pissed me off. I wanted to expose him for all the world to see. And while I was at it, I wouldn't forget to also skewer my mother, my brother, every boyfriend who hurt me, every girlfriend who dropped me, every teacher who embarrassed me, the waitress who was snotty when I ordered a side of cole slaw, Madame who yelled at me in French in the bathroom at Cannes when I hadn't broken her damn toilette, and the service man who strung the cable straight up the brick.

I was angry and the most salient feature of anger is that it won't be satisfied until the target feels its sting. But I've seen these tirades in print. Who would want to read about some math professor's wife from Podunk, West Nowhere who is pissed off about a crappy childhood? I know I wouldn't and you can't write a book that even *you* don't want to read.

Years later, after I was both spiritually and physically exhausted from the constant undertow of anger that was pulling me down, as well as the self-loathing, which cast a dark shadow on every personal interaction, I took my first uneasy steps in the direction of healing some of my wounds. With painful but welcome awareness, I reluctantly started to see my mother's participation in the lunacy and needed a new title. *Escape From Planet Ernie* provided a delightful vocabulary for our new family repertoire, staged at the kitchen table. Planet Ernie represented the inescapable gravitational center of my old family system. My brother and I were mere observation satellites and my mother a large uninhabitable moon. But it was Ernie's narcissistic pull that was so strong, it sucked all joy out of a room. The seed of truth was chilling if not compelling. If I wanted to be a free body, I needed to take control of my own throttle to leave his orbit.

This book would describe the dynamic of my alcoholic family, the role we were each playing in it, as well as the choices that were at

the same time elusive and unimaginable, obvious and gratifying, and mine to make. My anger was still simmering with the occasional roiling boil, but at least now it was focused squarely on my parents, where it belonged, and not on every innocent noncombatant that wandered haplessly into my sphere of awareness.

Once I found myself in Al-Anon, a twelve-step program for friends and families of alcoholics, I took to it like a duck to water after years of shunning advice to seek help there. I finally had to face the stark reality that there was nothing I could do to change my crazy parents, or more importantly, the out-of-reach reality of a dismal childhood. My simmering rage started to cool while my recovery focused on how I could change myself. *Lanie Doesn't Live Here Anymore* became my new working title. By now whole paragraphs would occasionally percolate up from my unconscious while I lay in bed in the morning. But putting those words to paper would require a lot more than the meager ego strength I had at my disposal.

Ten years after I finished my Ph.D. in mathematics, it was only just beginning to dawn on me that I wasn't the dumbest person in the room, any room, as my mother had always led me to believe. A woman once said about me, "You know that Lanie is really intelligent. You just wouldn't know it to talk to her." Still, the nagging problem, the source of the pretense that I was so desperately trying to hide from everyone, was that I thought I was bat-shit crazy. My new title became *I May Be Crazy, But I'm Not Stupid*.

I had archived the memories of shameful behavior on my part as best I could. But still, prominent cards in my mind's library catalogue appeared at unwelcome moments of recollection, triggered by the most seemingly insignificant objects or conversations. I would notice some trinket left over from my years as an undergraduate, a poster, a book or a reappearing college friend. I would cringe in shame and defensively quip that I was now really missing all the brain cells I killed in college. But I had accumulated some other cards in my catalogue too, cards that far outnumbered the ones categorized under "I'm bad." My life was centered on volunteer work. Randomly, I would become aware of individuals who needed help and, compulsively, I would gather my resources and do what I could for them, not telling anyone for fear that it would break the spell cast upon my misbehavior to make it disappear. I thought surely all this should be taken into account on Judgment Day. My new title: *Taken*

***as an Average, I Am a Reasonable Person.***

After my mother's death I found a meditation class, which I found to be very restive and calming. I hoped it would lead to great spiritual enlightenment and peace. It only led to a new title, ***Just Say Om.***

When I was afraid my fifth therapist would dump me, I briefly elevated ***Another One Bites the Dust*** to the top of the list. But this therapist was the jewel among jewels, the pick of the Jungian litter, the water to my duck, giving me a perspective around loving consciousness that was a healing salve for my inner wounds. She excused herself one day to go to the bathroom, parting innocently with the line, "***Thanks for Choosing Love,***" not realizing she had proffered yet another book title.

I sat on my back porch, barefoot, sipping chardonnay, admiring my backyard in the dark so I couldn't see the weeds, feeling rather satisfied by my surroundings and still trying to pretend that I could recover from such a painful childhood.

One night, as I was sipping chardonnay and ignoring weeds, I thought of the perfect title for my memoirs, encapsulating my path to recovery, emblematic of the human condition that gave rise to this craziness in the first place, maybe a touch ironic with just a soupçon of cynicism. ***I Rationalize, Therefore I Am,*** arose directly and inexorably out of finally recognizing my mother's prodigious ability to rationalize the irrational, to make sense out of the insensible, to explain the inexplicable, to congrue the incongruent. And I studied at the foot of the master.

I was so committed to *I Rationalize, Therefore I Am*, I even bought the domain name *irationalizethereforeiam.com*. I highlighted newspaper articles that exposed the dumbass excuses people came up with for their indefensible behavior. I observed the incredulous reaction of society when trying to process the inexplicable actions of our manufactured heroes: "What was Tiger Woods thinking?" I jotted down juicy examples, most conspicuously from political leaders and pundits, all so I could make my case that we all *are* but we don't necessarily *think* so great.

And then I changed my mind or maybe, it was my heart.

I had been practicing a meditation for a couple of years in which we silence our minds to see what else might be going on down in our souls when we're not so busy cogitating up in our heads. I had

decided to go to a retreat because, in spite of the many woo-woo moments I had had both in and out of meditation, I just couldn't believe I could possibly be doing this right.

At first I considered the title, *Eat, Pray, Work, Pray, Eat, Pray, Rest, Eat, Worship, Sleep* to honor my newfound path but it was too long. Then my terrifying fear of failure reared its snarling head early in the retreat, the fear that I would piss someone off, the fear that I would get nothing out of my time here, wasting my money and effort or the fear that I would find myself on the floor in fetal position, sobbing and wishing I could die. There was a pessimism that had left an indelible residue on my psyche, left from a childhood marked with horror, despair and disappointment, a pessimism that couldn't be wiped clean even by thirty years of happy marriage and a peaceful family life.

I went to the labyrinth, where I had seen others meandering around in thoughtful silence, and took my first step toward acceptance. I started to see, with every step, all of my blessings that had been camouflaged by pain, bitterness and pessimism, filters that I had acquired from childhood that cast a pall of negativity on every new experience. I literally counted my blessings, 379 of them to be exact and found myself triumphantly in the center of the labyrinth. Getting out was not going to be as easy when I decided to examine all of the horrible things that I had experienced, taking out every putrid piece of trash but wiping it clean first with the cloth of love and consciousness.

My new title, *The Labyrinth*, was about our circuitous path through this life with all the pain and joy around every curve. It was about seeking ourselves and being open to all the blessings and joy that life has to offer as well as the hurt, transforming our pain and learning from our mistakes, an inevitable part of life. It was about forgiving God for our trials and adversities, others for their trespasses against us, and most especially ourselves for never ever being good enough. It was about connecting with God through the messages and messengers God repeatedly sends to us with mostly meager results; connecting with each other because it is just so terrifying to feel that alone; but mostly connecting with our Self, our one true friend. It's the old cliché "*When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.*" Or the more accurate and preferred twelve-step program variant, "*When life gives you shit, make fertilizer.*"

My book titles were evolving in the same way that I was, finding a bigger and bigger consciousness with which to contain and connect with the world. But I wasn't finished yet. I hadn't walked out of the desert even though I kept finding these beautiful oases. I explored them all enthusiastically, but as I kept walking, I always found myself back out in the desert again.

After many years of psychotherapy, self-help books, retreats, step meetings and meditation classes, all heady pursuits, I found another facet of trauma that had yet to heal, my physical self, the bodymind that had no bruises you could see, and a way in which to heal it, the Feldenkrais Method®, succinctly and opaquely described as neuromuscular re-education. I took to it like a duck that couldn't be convinced it was a duck for years until it finally got up the courage to jump into the water and found out it could swim. There was only one appropriate working title for this memoir: ***Knock, Knock. Who's There? Pelvis.***

In twenty years, I accumulated a lot of tools for healing. I could finally look back to see the incredible miracle of growth that had taken place, both fast and slow. I kept plodding along this path, dragging my pessimism behind me, as well as my book title, ***And Nobody Was More Surprised Than Me.*** But one day, I discovered the seed from which all my misery had sprung, the little bang that had exploded this crazy universe. It was a sense of incompleteness, an emptiness, so deeply rooted in my psyche that it had left a spiritual vacuum in my mind, body and soul. Just finding the hole filled it up.

I arrogantly thought I had finally made it out of the desert. To say I was proved wrong is an understatement of Biblical proportions. After a series of prolonged, unrelated, and unrelenting triggers that dragged on for several years, I was terrified that I had slid back to the beginning, like a nightmarish game of Chutes and Ladders. I was back out in the desert again, angry, resentful, constantly complaining, and completely miserable.

But I kept walking.

Eventually I stumbled onto Peter Levine's book, *Waking the Tiger* and started another training called Somatic Experiencing®. I finally understood why the events of the previous few years had affected me so adversely, but more importantly, how to make it stop. My working title morphed yet again into ***Healing from Trauma in Ten Easy Steps (or One Really Hard One).*** I had found yet another

oasis. And most importantly, I understood for once and for all, there is no such thing as “recovered.”

Once I was consoling a friend of mine who was frustrated and confused by her recent recognition of the closet lunacy in her family. She knew I could empathize since she had met mine. I gave her sage wisdom from my many years in Al-Anon, humbly amounting only to the Serenity Prayer. As we chatted along, she asked me if I was still going to design websites and I said, “No,” that I was writing a book about my recovery.

I asked, “Would you like to know the name of it?”

She suggested, “***Please Tell Me These People Aren’t Related to Me.***”

Good title.