

Celeste Strong and Brave

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L'auteure a été victime d'abus sexuels de la part de son père, elle raconte son itinéraire vers sa guérison.

After years of intensive and expensive therapy, I finally was certain of the fact that I had been sexually abused by my father ever since I was a small child. You would think that an abuse such as this would be foremost in anyone's mind, so why did it take me so many years to be sure? Well, the fact is that I had been doubting my sanity for many years. These doubts about what was real and what wasn't had been planted in me since my early childhood. I remember his words telling me again and again that "this" was good for both of us while my inner self kept screaming that "this" was not good for me. I remember the psychiatrist I was forced to see after my first suicide attempt at 14 telling me that "this" hadn't really happened, that it was a fantasy all daughters had with our fathers. Therefore, although I knew that "this" had happened, I was forced to recognize that doctors know better what really happened and what had not because they are the scientists, the bearers of truth. So, my doubts about my sanity became stronger until I finally understood that I was the crazy one. I was the one who made up stories. I was the one who could not distinguish reality from childhood fantasies. And that is how I came to

know that "that" had never really happened.

But in the process of convincing myself of something that my body knew differently, I lost my identity. I didn't know if I was the obedient daughter and model student of certain days or the drug addicted whore of certain nights. I couldn't differentiate if what I felt for my father was love or hatred. I confused pleasure with pain, nightmares, and reality. And I lived this way for over 30 years.

But when the long negated fact of my abuse entered my conscious mind, my body awoke to an intense pain. I ached in every organ and every blood vessel. All my cells irradiated an immense agony. I couldn't sleep, I had anxiety attacks and vertigo, I ate and drank too much or not at all. I lived in constant suffering, with a sorrow so enormous that it took over my life. But in that pain I finally understood what caused me to hate myself so much that I had tried to kill myself not once but three times. In that pain I found the reason for my depressions, my phobias, my need to leave my body when things got "intimate" and my inability to remember parts of my life, especially my childhood. I understood why I had so many nightmares, why I went from avoiding sex for long periods of time to having sex with just about anybody and why I stayed married to a sadist for 15 years. I finally understood why I got

so much pleasure every time someone hurt me because it meant that I was right at least in my hatred of myself. But more important than this knowledge was my fury. Yes, the pain in my body gave me the gift of my fury.

This fury made me decide to change my last name. I did not want anything pertaining to my father to be with me or around me. I decided I would no longer be a Frascati, that from that day on I would take on my mother's last name. My name would be Celeste Ocampo. I was so happy. I was finally liberated from that father who had hurt me for over 20 years. Twenty years of torture that I erased from my conscious mind but whose effects I still suffer 37 years after the first rape. Years of believing myself crazy, dirty, evil. Incapable of accomplishing things I had set out to do and thinking I had no right to happiness. But when I finally knew that I had been raped over and over again by the same father whom I so loved and respected, I understood why I was so alienated and I was determined to free myself of all the guilt I had accumulated in more than 40 years of self-contempt.

Unfortunately, my happiness evaporated when my mother's face came to my memory. Poor Manuela Ocampo, always so sad, so submissive. I remember thinking that probably she, too, had been abused as a

child by my all-powerful grandfather. I also realized that my mother's last name was my grandfather's. There was no solution. No matter how far back I went in my family's last names, there was always a patriarch. I realized that all last names come from someone's father. If I wanted to be rid of all my male ancestors, I would have to eliminate all my last names. "It doesn't matter" I said to myself,

what isn't according to their interests. So I decided that the best solution would be to educate the new generations in the politics of non-violence and respect for everyone's human rights. But, yes, here again I found that those who decide what gets taught are the men and women who believe in the father's values. So I finally came to the realization that everything had to be changed. That

hatred and fear for my feminine body. As a feminist, I understand that this implies a dialectical process between the personal and the political. A long road in which I have to strive for structural and political changes but also for my own intimate personal transformation. One cannot happen without the other.

That is why I am on this road which is leading me to value my

I am learning to love my tortured body. My poor body dehumanized by the incest but also by the diets, the fashions, the doctors, teachers, priests, and other patriarchs. My woman's body abused by the money-making structures and by ideas about what a woman's body should look, act and be like.

"I'll create two good sounding last names for myself. I'll call myself Celeste Strong and Brave. Nice name, good-sounding name."

But this new happiness was also short-lived. I remembered that in my country, Costa Rica, this was not possible; you cannot change your last names. In Costa Rica the law says that everyone has to have two last names. The father's last name first and then the maternal grandfather's last name or if there is no father to recognize his responsibility in the birth of a new child, the child will carry her maternal grand and great grandfathers' last names. Of course, this law was made by the fathers. I decided I would change the law. But then I realized that the process needed to change a law was also designed by the fathers and that those who have the power to change the laws or change the processes to change laws are the fathers in Parliament. So, I decided to change the people who are in Parliament. But I soon realized that the electoral process was also created by the fathers in such a way that only fathers or those women who think like fathers get elected. I decided to denounce this in the media but it so happens that the owners of the media are the fathers and only they decide what is newsworthy and

we had to start anew. Create more life-respecting values, build totally new structures. But then I realized that most of the tools I knew how to use were invented by the fathers...."

No, I didn't give up. I decided that the father's tools would have to be used in dismantling his house, but that to do so successfully I would first have to know my own worth and my own strength as a woman living under the reign of the fathers. And to know these, I needed to listen to and believe what feminists all around the world are saying and have been saying for over six thousand years. I just wasn't listening.

So, I became a feminist human rights activist and, as such, I am learning to love my tortured body. My poor body dehumanized by the incest but also by the diets, the fashions, the doctors, teachers, priests, and other patriarchs. My aching body tortured even by other women who refused to believe my pain or their own. My woman's body abused from the outside and the inside, by the money-making structures and by the ideas about what a woman's body should look, act and be like.

This new found love for my brave body has helped me understand that I must fight for the end of this patriarchal system in order to end the

feelings as much as my intellect, my intuitions as much as my knowledge, my weaknesses as much as my strengths. I want to love my extra pounds, my dry vagina, my sagging breasts, my wrinkles and white hairs, all witnesses of my transit in this world which despises the female body. I am not there yet. But the road which I have traveled has taught me that it is possible to be a wise child, a proud adolescent, a peaceful adult, and a joyful elder in a world without false differentiations between ages, races, and abilities. A world where difference and death exist, but without hierarchies, abuses and war.

This road that I have decided to travel is difficult and sometimes even painful but not more so than believing myself crazy, dirty, and worthy of all punishments that come my way. I have promised myself that while I am on the road to this new life affirming culture, I will use my mother's last name even if it is my grandfather's. At least in the "Ocampo" my mother is present. So now you know, my name is Celeste Ocampo, but only for a while, only until the day I can call myself Celeste Strong and Brave.

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