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Mother-Daughter Covert Incest

I am a 41-year-old female who has suffered both overt incest and covert incest. My parents divorced right before I was born (I'm an only child) and my mother and I lived with her parents. I did not meet my father until I was an adult. We have a very distant relationship, talking on the phone maybe two or three times a year. My grandfather sexually abused me from the ages six to nine until he died of a heart attack. I blocked out the memories of the sexual abuse for years, but there were tons and tons of clues as to what had happened. I have had an overwhelming number of memories return over the last five years. I no longer have just clues, I have very clear memories. I've never had a therapist hypnotize me or try to "help" me recover memories. As I have gotten healthier, the memories have flooded back in. My therapist used to tell me that when my mind was strong enough to handle the memories, that they would come, and they did. I have struggled with depression and anxiety since junior high school. Over the years I saw a number of counselors. I have been hospitalized for depression three times since the early 1990s, for a total of eleven weeks. I was a cutter for twelve years. The last time I cut was September 6, 2005. I have been in therapy with an incredible psychologist since 2003 and have made an amazing amount of progress. In my very first session with him, after openly describing my life, he told me that he thought my biggest problem was not the depression or the cutting or even my grandfather. He said it was my mother.

My mother and I have had a difficult relationship all my life. When I was a child and was acting out as a result of the sexual abuse I was experiencing from my grandfather, my mother responded by punishing me abusively. I have memories of her lashing out at me in anger and rage. I couldn't tell her about the sexual abuse, because my grandfather had threatened me that he would die if I told. So I acted out. And instead of helping me, she abused me instead. From the time I was about 12-years-old, I became her escort and her grunt. I was always expected to do the "man's work" that her husband would have done, had she had one. I was always expected to meet her needs and make her happy by doing exactly what she wanted, when she wanted. I felt it was my job to protect her. Image has always been incredibly important to her. The first words out of her mouth, on many occasions, was "Who knows about this?" She has always tried her best to ignore my mental health problems. When I was suicidal my senior year in high school, she refused to call a counselor for me. When I called him, she was furious and refused to pay for the counseling. Once I became an adult, I learned to keep my counseling and depression hidden from her, which was very difficult to do.

It was difficult because there were no boundaries in my family. I had absolutely no privacy. My mother would walk in on me when I was using the restroom, taking a bath or shower, or changing clothes. She would get angry with me if I shut the bathroom door. She would walk around the house with little or nothing on and would make fun of me if I "acted modest" around her. She would make comments about my body, especially my breasts, and once I got married, would ask intrusive questions about my sex life. She is constantly touching me in ways that seem to me to be like a married couple would touch each other. She wants to take pictures of me all the time and put them in her album, as if I am on display. Two years ago, she snooped on my computer in my private writings while she was visiting my house,

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and then had the audacity to confront me and tell me how much I had hurt her. Many, many times through the years I have heard her say, "You were a great teenager, but you were a rotten kid!" Because she always told me I was a rotten kid, I internalized it and thought that the sexual abuse (and her physical abuse) was my fault.

In therapy over the last seven and a half years, I have made incredible progress. I have worked through so many emotions. My depression and anxiety are mostly under control. My psychiatrist is amazed by my progress and how I have been able to go off my medication. I went off my medication in order to get pregnant. And yes, at 41, I am seven months pregnant with my first child—a little girl. My husband is the most amazing man. He is incredibly supportive to me. Between him and my therapist, I have made great strides in my healing. When I first started trying to get pregnant two and a half years ago, I was very nervous. I had denied my maternal desire for many years out of fear that I would do to my child what my mother did to me. But once I admitted that I did want to have a child, that seemed to release something in me. Although I was not able to get pregnant, I could tell that my healing was happening at a greater rate. I finally went to a fertility doctor and did in vitro fertilization. And I am expecting a beautiful, little girl.

This time last year, my therapist was helping me decide what my goals were in respect to my mother. Long story short, I sent a letter to my mother in February telling her the truth about what had happened to me as a little girl, how I felt about her, and the struggles I had had. I invited her to meet with my therapist and I to discuss what had happened. She eventually did, and in June we had a week of sessions with me and my husband, my therapist and my mother. I learned something interesting—she said that she had a philosophy that seeking help was a sign of weakness. She point blank told me that she did not respect me for reaching out for help. My therapist has told me on many occasions that my mother is a narcissist. We've talked many times through the years about how so much of her behavior towards me felt incestuous. She's codependent. She's a lonely, miserable lady. She has been behind so much of my mental illness. She's got all these problems, and yet she doesn't respect me for reaching out. Well guess what, I don't respect her for hiding behind her "image" and refusing to get help!

My therapist point blank told her that she needed therapy. Of course, she has yet to do anything about that recommendation. We had another series of sessions the last week in September. In those meetings, we began to address the emotional incest (we didn't actually use that term, but we certainly addressed the issues, particularly the issue of how much she is always touching me). We talked about boundaries. Tomorrow we will begin another series of sessions. This time I will be reading her a letter I wrote to her, setting boundaries with her regarding when our child is born. She is going to be very upset, but I have got to set these boundaries because I am not about to let her do to my child what she did to me! My husband and I, and my therapist, are all in agreement—my mother is going to have limited access to her grandchild unless and until she gets into some serious therapy and starts addressing her mental illness and getting healthy. Even then, we are going to be very cautious about how much exposure our child has to my mother. I am very anxious about this

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week of sessions, but I know it must be done. I am getting healthy regardless of how my mother reacts.

I found this website a few weeks ago. I have known about covert incest since my therapist first told me about it in 2005 and I've read everything I could get my hands on about the topic. What has been a blessing to me about this website is seeing that there are other women who experienced mother-daughter covert incest.

When I stopped cutting five years ago, my therapist suggested I take the numerous poems and essays I had written and turn them into a resource to help others. Over the last five years I have done just that. I have written a 451 page book chronicling my journey to heal through therapy. I am in the process of trying to figure out how to get it published. Hopefully one day I'll be able to, and it will be beneficial to countless others who have suffered with incest, overt or covert.

My hope and prayer is that each one of you can find healing. My faith in God, my husband's support and strength, and my therapist's wisdom and guidance have brought me through a traumatic life. The first forty years of my life were characterized by abuse and sickness and dysfunction. My hope is that the next forty will be characterized by healing and joy and peace.

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