

Broken Windows

"He* came in through the bedroom window." Sounds like a Beatles song. Very catchy... except that it was my bedroom window and he had to break it to get in. There's glass all over my bed and floor. At first, that's all I can see. Broken glass. The Beatles melody keeps spinning around and around my brain like an old 45 rpm record on a turntable. But right now, I don't feel like dancing. I feel like screaming. I feel like beating something or someone to a bloody pulp. Tears stream down my face.

Minutes later, I notice that my laptop computer, and with it, the backup disk with the only complete copy of my book, has been stolen. I had just finished Chapter 11. Piercing sounds replace the Beatles' melody in my head and I realize that I am screaming. I can't believe that this has happened. I am a bomb that's about to go off any second. Someone stole my book, and I can't stop screaming. In this instant, I have no ego, no mind, no inner witness, and no emotional distance. I am my pain. I have slipped over the edge. I don't even care if the neighbors can hear me.

Once I calm down, I notice a third wave of violation. The contents of my jewelry case are spread across the top of my dresser. My drawers and closets have been ransacked. An empty bank envelope lays crumpled on the floor. My thoughts focus on the fact that a stranger has touched my panties. It's as if invisible hands are going over my body without my consent, and I feel dirty and gross. I feel like I am being watched, and I have the urge to crawl out of my skin.

The break-in renders me passive and afraid. I have no one to focus my rage or tears on except the holes left in my life. It's very hard to yell at an absence. By breaking into my bedroom, rifling through my panties and stealing my words, someone has shattered my privacy, my sense of emotional safety. They crossed boundary after boundary. It doesn't matter that rationally I know that whoever did this probably doesn't care about my underwear, my poetry, or my book. The "evidence" suggests that the burglar was only looking for money and small portable things to pawn.

Of course most extreme reactions are based on not just the current situation, which is often traumatic in itself, but also on some painful experience from the past. As a crisis counselor, I know this, but it takes me three days recognize the fact that I am not just reeling from the present invasion, but also from "forgotten" wounds from the past.

Of course, there's a reason that I locked those memories away. As I let them float through me, I feel like someone's using dental implements to rip open the scabs on my heart. Those memories are like private horror films

experienced through virtual technology. Inside I scream and cry as I watch my brother destroy or threaten everything I ever cared about as a child. Memories of him throwing my cat, Sylvester, into the dryer and turning it on, breaking my first and then my second guitar, kicking my goats, whipping my horse, and ripping up my first term paper (written in the days before computers and back-ups) race through my entire system. When I finally stop the memories, I feel like Sylvester must have felt when Mom made my brother turn off the dryer and open the door: battered, nauseous, frightened and mad as hell.

I know, as a crisis counselor, that I need to untangle the past from the present. This is difficult for reasons that surprise me. I am finding an odd sense of comfort in feeling like a victim. If I am a victim, then nothing is my fault. There's nothing I can do about it and I can just give up. I can complain and whine and get sympathy for how awful life has been. I do not have to deal with responsibility. I do not have to rewrite my book because it is hopeless.

Fortunately, I am stubborn enough not to let some asshole destroy me. The urge to rewrite my book is overpowering the urge to chuck it all and give up. I don't even care about my panties so much anymore. Someone saw a drawer full of Jockey's For Her. Big deal. If that excited them, they need professional help beyond what our prison system is capable and willing to provide. And hey, there's a chance somewhere between one in a hundred and one in a thousand that the police will recover my laptop. Who knows; I might even make money off of this.

So I'm fighting back. I know that trauma begets memories of trauma and that the only way to heal from trauma is to basically breathe through it. This involves "being present," accepting the pain and other emotions, and letting them flow through me. I got back into yoga and tai chi to help me do this. I also have begun writing again. Starting was pretty tough because I was pretty attached to my laptop and my usual writing space. But once I got going, I was fine. And it appeals to the rebel in me. Someone knocked me off my metaphorical horse and I got back on. It almost feels like I am "shooting the finger" at some oppressive force in the universe. In addition, I just installed a security system in my house so that I don't have to worry quite so much about all the thumps in the night. I have to admit that this feels much better than whimpering away.

*I am making the assumption that it was indeed a he. It is possible, though statistically less likely, that the culprit was a she.

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