
2

“Go Home and Get Over It”



We all have our stories. This book begins with my story, but you will have your chance to tell your story. Telling the story allows us to get things up and out. Up and out releases the pain. We process. We find resolution. We reach a place of peace.

For most of us, our stories are buried as far down as possible. If you are reading this book it is my guess that you have not shared your secret with anyone, or at least with only a few people whom you consider safe. We don't talk about it out of fear of condemnation, invalidation or just plain shame. It is human nature to avoid the risk of disapproval. For this reason, we keep our secret very well protected.

As a licensed professional therapist, the oldest client I've had was a 96 year-old woman who experienced a voluntary pregnancy termination in her early 30's. She almost went to her grave with her secret. In desperation, though, she wanted someone to hear her story. I listened with compassion and understanding. I felt privileged to be a safe place for her. There is something very healing about sharing life's losses with others. Weeping with this dear soul is one of my most treasured professional memories. Such a long time to keep a secret!

C.P.R.

I made my choice at age twenty, so “vpt” has been a part of my entire adult life. I’ve walked the road of choice and having done so feel I have the credibility to walk along side others experiencing pain or confusion from their “vpt” loss.

I was 20 years old, a sophomore in college when I found myself in an unplanned pregnancy. I was the only one in my family who’d ever gone to college. I had a full ride scholarship and there was “no way” I could face my parents or even myself by changing the course of my goals. The father was in the same situation. He was the only one in his family who had been to college. He was on work study with NASA, a coveted spot to be in and too valuable to give up for any reason. This was “his shot” at life. Please know that the object of this writing is not to bash my boyfriend and former husband in this “vpt” decision. Ultimately, I accept full responsibility for the “vpt” choice.

While recounting all the details is helpful in resolution, I remember very little about the days prior to the “vpt.” I will tell you what I know only because I will be asking you to do the same exercise. I remember sitting in my doctor’s office feeling very alone, overwhelmed, mostly in disbelief. I felt like I was in a car that had just slammed into a brick wall. There was “no way out” of this mess. I remember envisioning my Dad and my Mom’s face and how disappointed they would be. I did feel anger towards myself for being so stupid. I think the first doctor appointment could best be described as denial. I kept thinking the answer would be different than what I suspected.

When I told the father (now my ex-husband) the news he was angry. He told me there was only “one solution” to our situation. He would consider nothing else. Since I was feeling so much shame and worry about telling my parents I agreed with him. I had a horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach but I felt like

“GO HOME AND GET OVER IT”

this was my only way out. I didn't think about the pregnancy as a pregnancy.

Mostly, it was an inconvenient situation, a crisis that I really needed out of my way as soon as possible. I did not connect in anyway that this was a pregnancy.

I only remember two or three things about “the day.” I remember it was cold and windy, a March day. And then I remember that my boyfriend said, “It's over, it's done and we will never talk about this again.” And so the secret began. I did what he said. I never talked again until I was able to find a safe place to share my secret. This was over 20 years after the fact.

I do remember getting in the car and driving off. Mostly, I felt numb and did not think about this day for many, many years. Immediately, my first reaction was relief. Probably a bit like feeling you'd just been pardoned from a prison sentence.

It was about nine years later that “things” started surfacing. I am really one to believe that all things happen for a reason. My “vpt” resolution began with a book coming across my path. This is why I feel that there is a reason this book is in your hands. There are no accidents! Unfortunately, I do not remember the name, author or any details of the book. I only remember the writer detailing the events after attending her first child's funeral. *“A piece of my soul was buried with my child that day.”* It was a short sentence that would forever impact my life.

I began a quest for answers to the pain I was feeling. I was in a constant dialogue with myself. My thought patterns were bouncing back and forth between, “I don't feel anything” to “I feel everything” “I shouldn't be feeling anything” to “I feel a whole bunch of everything.” On and on...various different dialogues in my head with opposing patterns of consistency and sense. It was truly “crazy-making.” My most important goal began to be to stuff

C.P.R.

the feelings, the conversations in my head and pretend like they weren't there. I had my days. Sometimes I did this well. Other days I did not.

The next year, a series of re-occurring nightmares began. Always the dream would start with me walking out into a lake of water holding a baby in my arms. It was such a peaceful joyful moment. Then the dream would end tragically with the baby slipping through my arms. I saw the baby sinking down, down into the water.

I tried to reach it, but always its tiny fingers were just beyond my grasp. I looked down into the dark water to see the baby slowing sinking and then the baby's reflection in the water was forever gone. I would awake from the dream sobbing with tears. I had dropped my baby. I stood helplessly and watched as my baby sank to the bottom out of my grasp. The dream would haunt me for weeks afterwards.

Sometimes I would be exhausted and unable to sleep for fear the dream would come again. Always, I would go into a deep depression after the dream. In the next few years, the bouts with depression increased, along with this same recurring nightmare that many times caused me to dread going to sleep at night.

The dream continued quite frequently for another 7 years. Sometimes what I describe as a "heavy cloud" that I couldn't shake would hang over me. I felt like crying but the tears wouldn't come. I realize now, with all my therapy training that this was my way to process the pain of a loss that I had never allowed myself to grieve.

In retrospect, I believe if I had access to a book like "*C.P.R.*", if I would have had a venue to grieve and talk, these dreams would have stopped, I would have reached resolution at a much faster pace. Instead, I was isolated with no place to help me with the grief. I now realize so many other women were or are at this same place I was. What a shame!

“GO HOME AND GET OVER IT”

You see, I didn't feel like I had the right to grieve my loss -- there was no external evidence of a baby... and I didn't feel like I should be allowed permission to grieve over a loss that I had chosen.

My training now helps me understand that as human beings ALL losses must be grieved. Think of how, as a child, you began learning the grieving process. Oh, how painful it was to lose a friend or to lose that important ballgame. The loss of that first love...how painful is THAT! Even now as a parent, what a grief it was when my two boys walked out of the door to go to college! If you sit and think about life, look at how much loss is involved in the progression of life's daily living. Life is one long process of surviving and gaining victory in the midst of our losses.

Yet women who choose “vpt” are not allowed to cry about their loss, not even permitted by themselves, much less by other people. It is “expected” that we just “get on” with our lives. We are for the most part able to do that well.

At some point I went to a professional therapist in a town 180 miles away from me. I did want to ask him if the recurring dreams could be connected to the “vpt.” I did not want anyone in my near vicinity to know about the choice I'd made so long ago, so I was forced to drive this distance to find someone who did not know me. Little did I realize that because of confidentiality protection laws, my information would not have been disclosed anyway! Again, so sad...we have “back door voluntary termination of pregnancy solutions” removed from our culture, but *resolution* for the grief surrounding the choice is still being accomplished “under cover.” I drove 180 miles out of fear of disclosure in my local area concerning my deep, dark secret. This is a sad commentary on the disservice to women in our culture concerning choice decisions.

When I came clean to the therapist about the “vpt” and asked him about the dreams, he said, “You have made a valid choice. It

C.P.R.

is legal. You are making a big deal out of this. You need to just go home and get over it!” This was a total invalidation of my emotions by a professional. There is no way he understood that I was experiencing the effects of years of unresolved grief. I didn’t need him to validate my choice; I needed him to validate my *grief!*

I went home and “limped along” for seven more long years. I struggled with the dreams, tried to push them away and went through the emotions of “doing life.” Sometime later, in talking with a friend of mine who was a former pastor we somehow got on the topic of choice. His tone changed when he said, “I don’t feel a bit sorry for those women. They kill their babies... they should feel bad!” This confirmed to me that I could never be too cautious about where my secret might slip out. I could never be safe in disclosing.

I continued to keep my secret well under wraps. Sometimes I would wake up crying in the night. However, I even learned to muffle the tears there. If my husband were home in bed with me he would get really angry. Even though I didn’t “plan the tears” and really had no control over when I would just wake up crying, in frustration he would demand, “What are you crying about again?” I wouldn’t realize until some years later, again while in training for grief counseling, that this “midnight crying” was my mind, heart and soul’s way to process the grief I was feeling. Truly, the body remembers what the mind can’t confess.

Eventually, I started going to a church where the pastor had an “I’m a Pro-Choice Pastor” as a bumper sticker on his car. I felt I would be “safe” here. Ironically, though, even this point of view did not validate me. The grief was there and the fact that he believed in choice almost made me feel crazier!

Why should I feel so bad if even my pastor was OK with my “vpt” decision? Sometimes even getting the choice confirmed can be invalidating as far as the sadness and grief that is still lingering deep inside.

“GO HOME AND GET OVER IT”

In my journey, I'd found three outlets for “help.” One therapist and one pastor validated my choice, but not my *grief*. One pastor brought a message of condemnation and no hope. Truly, I had fallen through the cracks. I began to think I was the only person in the world with “this problem.” I was alone with no one to throw me a life preserver. And the dreams continued. Finally, I met another person who had walked the valley of grief over “vpt.” She gave me permission to cry. And cry I did. What a relief! What a difference that made in my life. I will be eternally grateful for this sister who walked me through the healing process.

So now I hope you see why it is so important that you know that you are NOT alone! There are others searching for answers. The crack is wide and the hole is deep. I hope this model of processing your choice will bring you the much needed resolution and validation you've been looking for!

What started as my own journey to peace has gone full circle. I've received my certificate of chaplaincy so I could learn how to counsel people in deep grief. I've gone through 12 long years of schooling to obtain my professional licensure in therapy. Now here I am ...a professional person bringing the message of processing and resolution to the world. I am motivated to bring a new level of information to those suffering in silence with their secret.

I hope you'll be encouraged as we walk this road together.

The life raft is floating by your side. Hold on and know that you are being pulled to safety by someone who has been there holding onto the rope herself.

There is an ancient Chinese proverb, “When the student is ready, the teacher will come.” It is no accident that you are reading this book. Your teacher is here so that means you are ready! Be encouraged and hopeful. You have permission to cry.