



LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT THE BIG PINK ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM!

Sometimes we feel pain, and rather than go through the pain, we suppress it and pretend it does not exist. We live today like yesterday never happened. Hear no evil, see no evil, *FEEL* no evil.

A funny thing happened recently when I told former JW's about my upcoming visit to Pennsylvania. Some asked that I never email them again because my journey and struggles with my family reminded them too much of their own and they didn't want to feel that pain. Others said they felt I was trying to gain their sympathy rather than provide support. They said up until then they saw me as invincible and now, seeing me vulnerable was upsetting to them. (Sorry, to disappoint, but only Jesus, superstars and cult leaders *really* walk on water. LOL) Still others said they wanted to leave it all in the past. Close the door; not interested.

Many claimed to be completely healed. But do we ever heal *completely*? My dad often told me during our conversations, "Let's not talk about that; it's in the past." I told him that if my family shuns me for the next 20-40 years, it's my future as well. Pretty poignant! I've come to realize that this will always be a part of me and to deny it is to deny myself. I don't live in the past, nor in any way am I consumed by it, but I recognize that the past, present and future are intertwined. What I do now through my cult education, I do for *future* generations. It's not about the past. As one person recently noted at my book club discussion, "You are the polar opposite of your mom. Your education leads people AWAY from cults and hers, TO them." I laughed and likened her to the negative charge of a battery; me the positive, of course. Humor helps.

It took me years to admit that I had even been associated with Jehovah's Witnesses—how embarrassing *that* was! However, I'm emphatic when I state in *Out of the Cocoon* that in order for us to have an unfettered future, we must embrace the past—the good and the bad. We cannot hide from it, nor should we ever be ashamed of it. After all, it made us into the beautiful human beings we are today. It has made us more insightful, more compassionate and far more appreciative of our freedom. We are the sum of our experiences.

What would happen if you were being blackmailed and someone said, "Give me \$1 million or I'll tell the entire world that you...." (insert your deepest, darkest secret here)? What if instead of being afraid you took out a full page ad in the NY Times disclosing your secret and wrote right below it, "So-and-so tried to extort money from me to keep this big pink elephant hidden." Well, for one, people might think you are a little crazy. But they might also admire and respect you for being so forthright. The beauty of embracing our past, our secret pain, and not being afraid to talk about it (or show it) is that we stop feeling anxious about it. It no longer holds any power over us. It's like an alcoholic standing in front of a group of people at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting and saying, "My name is __. I'm an alcoholic." The truth is liberating!

I was reading Oprah Winfrey's *O Magazine* a few months back while getting my hair cut and thought I'd share some good quotes from Martha Beck's "Guide to Avoiding Avoidance," February 2006, p. 73:

"When we run from our feelings, they follow us. Everywhere...Once we're willing to confront our emotional suffering, we begin making choices based on attraction instead of aversion, love instead of fear...What happens when we're willing to feel bad is that, sure enough, we often feel bad—but without the stress of futile avoidance. Emotional discomfort when accepted, rises, crests and falls in a series of waves. Each wave washes parts of us away and deposits treasures we never imagined. Out goes naiveté, in comes wisdom; out goes anger, in comes discernment; out goes despair, in comes kindness...if you can **avoid** avoidance—if you can choose to embrace experiences out of passion, enthusiasm, and a readiness to feel whatever arises—then nothing, nothing in all this dangerous world, can keep you from being safe."



Whatever a cult has done to you, whatever ill feelings reside deep within, accept them, realize you can't change the past but that *tomorrow's* past is being created today—right now. You have the power to shape and mold your past from this point forward! Forgive the cult and your family/friends that rejected you, not for them, but for **yourself**. If you desire, tie up loose ends, perhaps as I just did, and continue to enjoy the wonderful life still ahead. Use rejection to propel you forward, starting today. Don't be afraid of a dysfunctional cult's label (e.g., apostate) or that silly pink elephant in the room!

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