

Healing in Community

Part of our virtual community met at midday yesterday in a coffee shop. The six of us, from two generations, looked like any group of women in a setting like that. Ladies of leisure, so it appeared, or at least ones who could take a long lunch break.

I greeted the others with excitement and recognition, but also with surprise. I knew their faces but not their physicality. One woman was shorter than I pictured her, another taller. One smelled of a fresh and lovely shampoo when I hugged her.

I ate salad as we talked, someone else a sandwich. The others just had drinks and one of those was something iced and red. I didn't ask what it was, though I wondered. We talked about where we lived and what we did and some of us showed each other pictures of our kids. I don't remember if there was laughter...there might well have been. I hope there was. I'm sad that I don't recall.

Anyone looking on might have wondered about us. Were we coming from yoga class, or were we perhaps a school or church committee of some kind? What brought us together and led us to that place and time? When I see groups in public I often indulge in that sort of conjecture. In this case, though, I doubt anyone would have guessed correctly.

We were a subset of a group of women bound together by pain and anger and a shared desire to reclaim ourselves, and possibly our marriages. Brought together by a skilled and caring woman who reached out to each of us, we are among the lucky ones, though most of us would be hard pressed these days to call ourselves lucky. But, we have been given the gift of the chance to heal our broken hearts and spirits in community, and so we sat in that coffee shop and we talked, and we healed just a little bit more.

We told parts of our stories again, even though we'd shared them already in our Wednesday evening virtual meetings. Somehow, some of the details needed to be repeated where we could feel each other's physical presence and look into each other's eyes. We shared outrage at how we had been treated, and at our partners' duplicity, and we marveled (but not in a good way) at their ability to compartmentalize. We cheered one of our number who got revenge of sorts, even though it was by accident. We gave support in the form of hugs, support we are usually only able to offer with words, and we cheered each other on.

At one point, we went around the circle and talked about who we were...before.

We all knew what was meant by before.
Before we knew we had been betrayed, before we lost ourselves as we knew ourselves and our marriages as we thought we knew them,
before anger, and grief, and therapy, and programs, and podcasts, and books on sex addiction took over our lives,
before we knew what betrayal trauma or porn addiction were, or how one hired a sex worker, or the fact that our husbands lived secret lives and were masters of so many awful things we never thought would touch us and our families.

Before then, we believed ourselves to be women with security and loyal partners, and we were able to pursue our interests and passions and dreams.
We shared some of those with each other,
hoping that we would once again be those people, no longer encumbered and undermined by betrayal and insecurity and distrust.

In the not too far distant future, our Massachusetts contingent will meet again, this time for dinner.
Our Long Island and Westchester sisters will follow our example and meet in NYC.
Some of us may meet again in person on retreats or at trainings.
We will continue our slow but steady recoveries, both on our own and together.
We'll only meet occasionally like this in person,
but each Wednesday evening, in the safety of the virtual haven offered to us by Sue,
we will have the precious opportunity to learn from each other,
to share our pain and our triumphs,
and to continue to heal in our community of shattered but strong and loving women.