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Landscapes: Black wood panel

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The few memories flash through my mind, a mental patchwork quilt of fear and loneliness. The dining room: milk glass spilt, spaghetti sauce slowly sliding down the wall. Another dinner interrupted. All the yelling ends up in Mom's bruises and her tears.

The Christmas Dad got a parka, I received a doll. My memories placed like still life photos on a page. The lighted tree was flung out the door by night's end. Too many times, late at night, the little girl in her room tries to rock herself to sleep. She could never feel safe with those dark walls around her, with the front door so far away.

Several times, my duty is to run out for help. Yet, due to fear, and not wanting to interrupt, I could hardly make a sound or knock on a door. That was certainly true the fateful Sunday morning at 7am. My timid knocks didn't wake up the neighbor. Sunlight streaming through the curtain pane, I walked back into the bedroom. Sister's bassinet was tipped over and she was crying. Immersed in their yelling and chaos, they couldn't hear. He would have hit me, but she stepped in the way.

Years to come, she didn't let me forget. There is no way I could forget, even without her outbursts, reenacting out the violence previously dealt her. All I heard was that I wasn't enough. The darkness of the walls reflected the despair and pain in their souls.

Walking down the dark hallways now, they seem so small. I feel like a character in a surreal dream. I have dug deep to help that scared girl let go of fear and gain her voice.

"I'll always be weird" but now, I embrace this. It had taken 20 years to unwind and overcome 18 years of repression. Since then, I've continued on my journey of healing, loving, accepting and forgiving myself, my parents, and others.

I make sure my kids never know that the flower pictures in the bathroom cover the punched holes in the wall. Those chaotic people no longer exist. They should only know the kind, older folks that are left behind.

Last fall, an old neighbor described different things we did as kids. I couldn't remember anything she described. That's when I realized; who she described was no longer me.