

## Foreword

The compendium before you is simply remarkable. It relates a story so deep, so courageous, so transforming that I don't think I have anywhere encountered its equal. It is an insightful and articulate documenting of the painful, undulating and winding journey from breakdown and devastation toward a life lived with hope. It is inspirational!

It is not, however, a light read. The origin of this story is a beautiful life devastated by profound, long-term sexual abuse. I've often thought that sexual abuse is the reliable fast-track to destruction of the human psyche. In these pages, we see how it plays out: the impact on family relationships, on psychological and physical health, on lifestyle, eating and body image, on the forming of sexual identity and intimacy, on relationships and work practices, on spirituality and on the will to live.

It's not that the abuse itself is presented graphically; Monique has a unique way of portraying these experiences as if in a glimpse, a fleeting image, a symbol, a passing shadow. It's the results, the ravages of abuse, on body, mind, heart and spirit that we are invited to witness.

But of course, that is not all. There are heroes in these pages: doctors and therapists and pastors who hold Monique when the pain is most unbearable. There are friends who walk with Monique on the long journeys in the deep darkness, who never stop loving and believing. There is extraordinary courage, the quest for truth and justice, amazing moments of healing and forgiveness and liberation and love. There is the quest for authenticity in relationships and in faith. And there is Monique's own music, reflecting and illumining the path.

Sexually abused or not, very few of us get to adulthood without some experience of our own trauma. Our survival

has often depended on us developing protective mechanisms to keep us safe. As we grow, we discover that some of these protections no longer serve us; they keep us small and hidden or they push intimacy away or they make us constantly anxious or fearful or push us toward numbing addictions. We can feel stuck and trapped in our own prisons of inner pain and despair. Some of these prisons consume people. It's important that we honour this journey too.

This compendium of books invites us to open ourselves to hope. As Monique points out in her introduction, hope is not always bathed in the golden light of a gentle sunrise. It's not always soft and comfortable at all. There is often something gritty about hope, disturbing us to have one more crack at something that has held us captive. Sometimes we can't hold onto hope ourselves and we need others to do the hoping for us. And then there are the times when we get a glimpse of a discovery that we are not in the same place we once were; we have in fact moved and some new vistas open for us. And sometimes we look back and realise how far we have come.

On this journey toward integrity and healing we probably won't ever 'arrive'. Over 15 years ago, Monique said to me, 'I fully expect that on the day they finally lay my body to rest, I will still have unfinished issues in my life.' I resonate with that strongly; there is always work for us to do on our own walk toward freedom and authenticity. The journey is hard, especially when our earliest experiences have been blighted by terror.

And yet, terror and abuse are not the only things that define us. As we read in these pages, there is kindness and hospitality and wise listening and safe holding... and there is spirit and there is love. There is transformation and there is hope.

This compendium will be a support to those who live their own stories of abuse and a rich resource for those of us who work with patients or clients or friends who are working through their own nighttime of abusive terror. But it is more than that. It is a tribute to the courage to live another day and the people and communities that hold us and the extraordinary capacity of the human spirit to heal. It is a story of hope.

– Rev. Andrew Woff, May 2024