

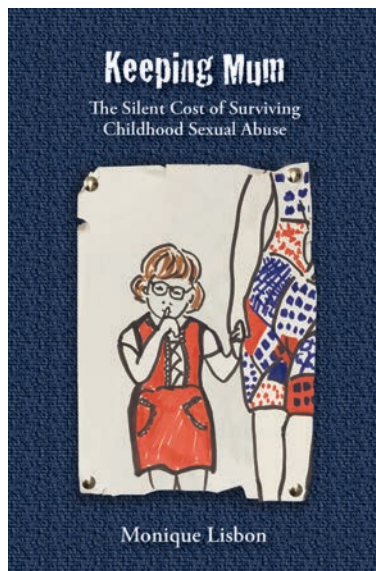
BOOK REVIEW

Keeping Mum: The Silent Cost of Surviving Childhood Sexual Abuse

By Monique Lisbon

(Living Hope Resources: Ashburton, 2017)

ISBN: 978-0-646-97036-3 (paperback and audio CD)



This is not a book for the faint-hearted. Monique Lisbon presents her autobiographical memories and reflections on the complex and harsh realities as a survivor of sexual abuse in the family. There are ten short thematically-based chapters, each linked to an original song written and produced by the author. Each chapter moves between different memories from different times in life: from the young kindergarten child to a disturbed woman in her thirties. Although the times keep changing, the short segments combine into an overall impact that is powerful.

The images are vivid. There is the horror of the six year old experiencing her father pressing her to the floor with a skipping rope around her throat, threatening death if she tells anyone about what 'they' have been doing. At times the contrast is chilling, as the unrestrained fury of the father is contrasted with the cowering small child, trying to hide. The reflections from her adult years encompass self-harm, psychiatric hospital admissions and various forms of therapy.

The brief discussion of a time in family therapy reveals a seeming conspiracy of silence and denial from the other members of the family. Family therapy rests on an understanding of the family as a system – that is, when one person suffers in a family it indicates there is a problem in the family as a whole. Monique's childhood experiences of sexual and emotional abuse tell a contrary story. She seems to be the focussed recipient of the violence and animosity of the family system, while her father, mother and older brother live in a dismissive show of normality.

The title of this book 'Keeping Mum' has a double meaning. Keeping mum is a survival mechanism, Monique's silence about her abuse forming part of her defence against the fear of her father – the charming, present-giving father who is also the 'Monster'. The title can also speak of the deep connection between a mother and child, particularly in the situation of a dysfunctional marriage. As the child is aware of the imbalance of power between the father and mother, there can be a desire from the little girl to support or protect her mother. 'Keeping Mum' can refer to trying to keep her mother safe, not expressing her own pain or need for fear of stirring up the father's retaliation. Additionally, the horror escalates in the realization that the mother is complicit in enabling the abuse to continue and expand through childhood. Although the mother is officially the 'non-offending' party in the family system, her denial and continued trivialization of the abuse are a shock and reveal her active collusion. Maybe this is the harshest reality; the mother was unable to see, to know or to protect her daughter.

This is an important book. It rings with authentic detail. In the area of supervision in child and family ministry I value this book as an educational tool. For those in the professional care of children there must be awareness of the great damage that can be done to small children in the secret and silent life of a family.

– ***Vivienne Mountain***

PhD, MA (Therapeutic Arts), MA (Theology), MA (Phil of Religion), B.Th., B.Ed.

Vivienne has been involved in the design and delivery of units of study in the area of children and families ministry at the University of Divinity. Currently she provides professional supervision for Counsellors and those in Christian Ministry.

Available from www.livinghoperesources.com.au in paperback and eBook formats