

Chapter Fifteen

Karla and Anxiety

**

My co-existence with anxiety began so early in life I barely have a memory of when I felt safe and secure. I believe I was predisposed to anxiety; that I was born with it in my makeup and it would lead to disaster if it wasn't seen or noticed. Anxiety like mine is a long-lasting, deep-rooted condition. It started when I began suppressing my emotional responses to situations in my life. I cannot explain why I never spoke up in my defense or in my worry; I just didn't do it. Perhaps my instincts spoke to me differently than Kathie, my instinct said stay quiet. Being home alone a lot could have spoken to me in a way that kept me silent. Don't rock the boat; life needs to go as Mother deems.

Incidents occurred that kept me scared. There was reading circle in first grade, when a classmate declared that her cousin had died because he swallowed his tongue. I was horrified by this revelation. I didn't know you could swallow your tongue, and I didn't want to die, so I worried and fretted about it to the point of keeping my tongue between my teeth for months. Also in grade school, I was taken to a dental appointment and brought back to school late enough to miss lunch. They fed me in the cafeteria all alone and served me chicken. I choked on this chicken to the point of almost losing consciousness. From that point on I knew I could die from choking and had a horrible time eating anything without fear of dying. I have this fear to this day. I always remind myself to be careful; this could be the meal that does it. I take small bites and chew thoroughly always.

I was accosted by bullies twice while in grade school, both times when I was alone and both times by boys. The first time was in our neighborhood on Anderson Avenue. I was riding my bike on a trail in a field off our street. A boy jumped out from behind a bush and screeched at me. He scared the shit out of me! I screamed bloody murder and took off on my bike through the rest of the trail to finally end up at the road, where I promptly fell and injured my left knee badly. I still have the scar, it was that bad.

The other time was at the school playground. My aunt Denise, who was my age, and I went to play by ourselves at the school. While we were on the monkey bars, three boys attacked us. They pushed us, pulled our hair, kicked at us, said abusive things and wouldn't let us be. The only thing that saved us was that an elderly man just happened to show up and scare off the boys. We ran to him and put our arms around him and thanked him for helping us. He told us to go home straight away and tell our mothers. We did run home but I do not recall telling my mother anything or recall any outcome. It's as if that part never occurred. Perhaps it didn't, perhaps we

just ran home and being there felt safe at least and stuffed it away.

These attacks reinforced my belief that the world was not safe for me. Things just kept happening that continued to prove this point.

Oddities that are hard to explain happened to me, too, when we lived on Anderson Avenue. I was asleep in my room, (Kathie was sleeping, oblivious to this encounter) on the bottom bunk of our bed, when suddenly I woke up, perhaps sensing a presence. When I looked to my left, there was an elf kneeling at my head. He was a male elf in elf clothes with a pointy hat and pointy shoes. He was small in size and had a thin face, long and lean with a pointy chin. He had a goatee. The horror of this was that he looked evil. I didn't get a warm feeling, as if he was there to be friends. I was so scared at what I saw that I was stupefied. I just gasped and turned my face into the pillow and lay as still as possible. Then I fell back asleep. I never had this vision again, but it would stay with me forever. I still can see his face and clothing as if the incident had just happened.

One of the other unexplainable things I saw as a child happened in the same bedroom. Same circumstance, too. I was awakened unexpectedly in the night and looked up and forward to my bedroom door. What I saw scared me again into hopeless fright. It was my "Kissy" doll walking toward me, moving her arms in and out to make the kiss sound. I screamed this time, and it was loud and bloodcurdling. Mother rushed in, and when she came through the doorway there was a bright flash and the doll was gone! I was crying and fearful. The next morning, the doll was at the head of my bed, on the floor. This was confirmation to me that what I had seen was real, even though I didn't have clarity on where the doll was before this visual. Since that incident and that of the elf, I have had a fear of dolls and puppets. I cannot stand to see them in stores or movies or to read about them in books. I don't have a recollection of my mother's reaction or comments, I do know she brought me to bed with her, and that helped.

The other thing I saw that seemed odd to me when I was small was blind people. This would be the first time I saw people that were blind, I believe I was six or seven years of age. We were getting gas and a group of them walked by. I did not understand why they acted fitful, walking strangely, bumping around, and laughing. I think I asked, "What is wrong with those people?" and was told by my mother, "They're blind." That was it; "They're blind." Well to me it meant that if I went blind I would behave like they did that day and not be able to find my way. I thought that I would go blind if light was instantly taken from me – that being immersed in darkness suddenly would destroy my ability to continue to see. No one explained how people became blind; I just thought it could randomly happen. This was additional confirmation that the world was not safe and, further, that I could not have a say in what happened to me. There was no control, I thought; it was all random. Being little isn't always easy for the best of children; I had wild thoughts and feared everything on first impulse.

There were other incidents that kept confirming these ideas for me, such as our bad neighbors, the sawdust barn, and my sister's tale of a murder in the neighborhood. The neighbors would instruct their children to say things to us about how we weren't wanted in the neighborhood. We were poor people that couldn't afford our own home, that we were wrecking the neighborhood by living in those duplexes. Kathie and I were at our Grandma Helens house and they lived near an old sawdust mill. We would go there and meet up with other kids and they told me that if I went and stepped upon the sawdust that I would sink in to the pile and suffocate and die. Kathie told me about a man that had been murdered in the neighborhood on Anderson Avenue and that they hadn't found the body right away and that it was in the house a long time. And that he'd been killed by bad people. You can die from standing on sawdust, you are bad for living in a duplex, and there are people out there that kill others. Combine all these things into the mind of a fretful girl, a frightened girl, and they spiral out of control.

My mother was so busy getting educated that she was never a resource for questions or crying. We had to go to bed at seven every night so that she could study uninterrupted. She flat out didn't have time for us. Kathie and I were not a priority in her life, and we suffered for it.

My mom did not have anxiety. She had ambition, which can be just as deadly to a child like me. I suppressed all my fears while living on Anderson Avenue and brought them with me when we moved, before I started the fifth grade.

I have spoken of my mother meeting a man while we lived on Anderson Avenue. He was the one who married my mother and bought us the big farmhouse in Ridgefield, where my nightmare worsened and my anxiety grew.