

A Small Boy Smiling

*A remarkable journey of healing from
the trauma of child sexual abuse
to spiritual awakening*

Matt Carey

A Small Boy Smiling

*A remarkable journey of healing from the trauma
of child sexual abuse to spiritual awakening*

Copyright © Matt Carey 2018.

Published by Matt Carey Books 2018.

www.mattcareybooks.com

ISBN 978-1-9996033-0-4 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-9996033-1-1 (e-book)

Matt Carey has asserted his moral right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner except for the use of quotations in a book review.

Editing by Tom Bartlett, www.facebook.com/bartlettbiographies

Matt Carey Books
www.mattcareybooks.com

INTRODUCTION

There were many times when I looked in the mirror and hated what I saw. Looking back at me was the face of a haunted, broken boy, who was full of fear, confusion and a deepening sense of self-hatred, but who didn't know why. The man looking in the mirror tried desperately to understand what the hell was going on, yet he could barely remember anything; there were just flashes of memory, and a deep, visceral feeling of horror buried inside of him, which was crippling his life.

My life has been one of extremes, since suffering the horrific trauma of being regularly sexually abused in public toilets at the age of eight years old, and leading on to teenage alcoholism, 'sexual anorexia' and living with complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD). And now? I have been blessed with over twenty-five years of recovery from addiction, a successful, fulfilling career in theatre and festival management and, for the most part, a sense of peace and purpose in my life. Far beyond the material success I have achieved, the most important realisation is that I know I am being intuitively guided on a journey of spiritual awakening which is hugely rewarding and profoundly healing. I have become aware of a beautiful presence deep within me, which is a source of immense strength and love.

The psychological and emotional trauma of the abuse has served a much greater purpose than I could ever have imagined when I first reached out for help. It became a powerful catalyst for my recovery and spiritual growth. I wouldn't wish what I went through as a boy on anybody... but the experience of having been abused by different men at different times compelled me to seek recovery and a positive life through spiritual and physical travels, which I might not otherwise have undertaken.

At this point, I feel I should warn readers that I have described the abuse exactly as it happened, in all of its shocking, disgusting detail. To have done otherwise would have been to dilute the impact of my story. One of the reasons I have written this book is to try to help others who may have gone through a similar hell, and to highlight the long-term consequences of child sexual abuse (CSA). I would also like to use my story to call attention to the need for more resources to support survivors of CSA. This book has first and foremost, however, been written for me, as I have needed to;

1. Reclaim my childhood from the sick men who abused, molested and raped me, and in doing so tried to destroy me in body, mind and spirit.
2. Learn to love the amazing, ten-year-old boy who somehow managed to survive – a boy I have for many years of my adulthood despised and rejected as weak and pathetic.
3. Release the blocks within my mind which have crippled my hopes of becoming a loving partner, a good father, and of having a family of my own.

Finally, I am writing my story in the hope that fellow survivors of sexual abuse, of which there are estimated to be well over a million in the UK alone, might find encouragement and strength to get the help they desperately need to heal. I am very grateful to Sarah Paton Briggs, my psychotherapist, who has written a later chapter, *Soulful Space: Reflections On My Therapy Work With Matt*. Sarah brings her considerable expertise and offers a professional perspective to my journey of healing, therapy options, and practical advice to fellow survivors of sexual abuse who may be considering professional therapy.

WRITING ABOUT THE ABUSE

A close friend (a clinical psychologist, CSA survivor, and a recovering alcoholic), who has supported me throughout my recovery suggested I provide a description of the psychological and emotional process I went through to get the memories of the abuse from the mind to the page. She told me that when she read the abuse chapter, she sensed that I had dissociated from the trauma, which is true; I didn't think I'd last five minutes without breaking down. During a traumatic event and throughout the emotional upheaval that often follows, dissociation is one of the mind's most common coping mechanisms in response to feeling a sensation of threat or danger. Dissociation covers a wide variety of experiences, from mild detachment to a complete disconnection from all conscious physical and emotional experiences. It is also a common symptom of Complex PTSD.

Whilst I had spoken about the abuse in therapy for many years, writing everything I could remember about what happened made it feel so much more real, and this horrified me. To be able to get it on paper, I decided I had to deliberately suppress all my emotions, as I describe below. I'm not suggesting this is the best way to do it, but it was the only way I could find to be as brutally honest as I have been, dealing with the day-to-day challenges of living with Complex PTSD.

PTSD is a psychiatric disorder that may develop after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which severe physical harm occurred or was threatened. Traumatic events that may trigger PTSD include sexual and physical assaults, natural or unnatural disasters, accidents, or military combat. The term PTSD was first used by veterans of the Vietnam War, but the problem has existed for a lot longer and has had a variety of names, including shell shock, battle fatigue, combat stress, and post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS). One of the symptoms of PTSD is that I often go into shock as the memories come up, and whilst I feel hyper-vigilant and very anxious as soon as I have been triggered,

there is delayed reaction to my feeling the intensity of the anger, shame and guilt until later that day.

The challenge was to focus all my attention on the writing whilst doing my best to ignore the emotional trauma that was building up inside of me. As I contemplated making a start, I felt the trauma had been triggered in my mind, and under my skin (the symptoms included physical tension in the groin and lower back, nausea in the stomach, and pain behind my eyes); mentally I knew I was very fragile. I knew this was an inevitable consequence of confronting my painful memories, and that I'd have to accept and work through them as best I could. I feared that if I attempted to write on my own, the shame and rage would attack me, and I wouldn't be able to get very far with the written work. It was also important to me that my new flat felt like a safe place, which hadn't been contaminated by memories of the abuse.

As odd as it may seem to some (but for me to feel more able to suppress the emotions and get everything I could remember on paper), I decided to write down the memories in several cafes across central and north London over a period of six months. I wrote brief notes which gradually became sentences, which were then revised to become paragraphs and a chapter, and which were eventually sent to my editor, Tom Bartlett, for editing. Being in a public place, and having pride and an ego, helped to suppress the negative emotions, so I could 'get the job done'. I followed a schedule of an hour of writing, and then I went to an AA meeting, or for a long walk in Regents Park or across Hampstead Heath, during which time I'd feel the shock, and the shame, and rage come up, and during this I'd practice some helpful concentration techniques to make sure I didn't fully dissociate. Depending how I felt, I'd force myself to do at least three hours of writing about the abuse for two days each week, and then I'd leave it to focus on another chapter.

After some writing sessions, I felt I might lose consciousness. Whilst I didn't have any physical warning (unlike with a panic attack, I didn't have any palpitations, or shortness of breath), I'd suddenly feel very light-headed and my vision would become slightly impaired. If I was out walking, I would immediately find a wall or bench and hold on tight to keep myself bodily conscious until the experience had passed. I avoided travelling on the Underground when I felt like this, and walking near traffic, just in case my legs did give way. (There were several occasions when the flashbacks to the abuse, and the shame I felt, made me feel suicidal; I didn't trust myself when it felt like this, and so there was another reason to avoid taking the Underground). The sensation was as if

I'd had a sudden rush of oxygen to the brain. Perhaps it was that the writing had released a great deal of energy which had been locked into the memories. Later in the evening, the suppressed emotions (the shame, rage, and sometimes the tears) would finally hit me, and I would make sure I was in a safe place, which was preferably at home. I felt so desperately vulnerable at this point, I couldn't handle anyone else seeing me like this.

The whole process of writing the chapter about the abuse was mentally, physically and emotionally exhausting, but it has certainly helped me to release so much of the shame and rage. From start to finish, it took eleven months to write that one chapter.

THE DISGUSTING RUSTY TIN (*excerpt*)

If you want to see the brave, look to those who can return love for hatred.

If you want to see the heroic, look to those who can forgive.¹

Bhagavad Gita

‘Abuse’ is a widely-used word these days, and it’s a word that covers a range of actions and behaviours, in which one person or a group of people cause pain to another. ‘Pain’ There’s another word in frequent use, and applicable to any number of situations. They’re only words on a page, and have no power by themselves. I could have come out and said that the words apply only to me, and left it at that, but that would not have been enough.

There came a time when I couldn't keep running away from my past anymore. In my late thirties, a series of events had triggered off my PTSD to the extent that I felt a visceral, primeval rawness within me that I could not bury any longer. Shame had silenced the child for decades, but I could feel the child within me suffocating from years of neglect and self condemnation; I needed to allow him to breathe, to give him the voice he so desperately needed, for him to finally be allowed to tell his story, and to be at peace.

I am now ready to acknowledge and honour the remarkably courageous young boy who was subjected to horrendous sexual, psychological and emotional abuse at the

¹ Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, trans., *Bhagavad Gita – The Song of God* (Signet Books, 2002)

hands of a group of well organised, predatory paedophiles, and who has survived to become a decent, kind and compassionate man. The events I describe took place during a period of perhaps 18 months, from the Easter holidays of 1981 to the autumn of 1982, when I was between eight and ten years old.

For most of my life I've struggled to comprehend what had actually happened. I had a sense that this tied in to the fact that, for years I hated looking at photos of myself in the family album; especially any photos which my mother described as of a boy who was handsome and cute. Among several I once detested, there are two in particular which to me are tainted with the abuse because of how I felt when they were taken. In one, I am ten years old and the abuse is about to continue for several more months. I am wearing my school cap and tie, looking at the camera with a real darkness in my eyes; I remember feeling haunted at the time. In the other photo, I am perhaps twelve years old, and standing in the back garden at home, blonde hair and blue eyes, and holding the three cups for athletics I had won at School Sports Day. I had felt a shudder of shame flash through me and a feeling of disgust deep within me when that photo was being taken; I didn't deserve the attention, and was not worthy of any recognition or praise. I remember thinking to myself, 'if they knew the truth about me, if they knew what I was really like, they'd hate me for what I've done'. That was the extent of the self-hatred I experienced as a result of the abuse.

Due to the passage of time, and the barriers I had erected in my mind, the memories of the abuse are, with the exception of those first and last instances, often vague and jumbled, and not necessarily chronological. A few memories involve several seconds of me with two or three men in different public toilets, and I see myself from above looking down on what is happening. Whilst my awareness is 'out of body' I can often vividly 'smell' the rancidness of the toilets and the stench of cheap disinfectant; and 'feel' the cold, slate tiles and concrete floors, the old fashioned rusty cistern, the crispness of the sheets of toilet paper, and the dead leaves collected behind the toilet. But far worse is the physicality of the men; their sweating, their laboured, nervous breathing, and their bulging, staring eyes as they climax in front of me. Then, at other times, I can recall some of the more experienced ones acting with such a sense of menace and control. It was as if they felt that they had a divine right to do what they were doing, and I meant nothing to them now. That reality terrified me more than anything. When I realised they didn't care

about me, it meant sooner or later it would stop. You always fear something far worse will happen when it eventually stops.

As I write now, I still feel the dirtiness, fear and tension throughout my body. I see myself from above; what they are doing to me, and what I am told to do to them. It is horrific and shocking to 'watch' but I am switched off, to some degree, both during the abuse and in the recalling of it... and I also know that I have to face these memories to deal with them. I am continually separated from what is happening, and there is a sense in which I am not fully conscious of the experience I am seeing. I am in shock. I know it's me; I can see it's me. The emotional intensity of the memory is delayed. Whilst I feel uncomfortable and nauseous recalling the memory, it is only later that the intensity of my emotions hits me, and I feel very depressed, dirty under the skin, full of rage, distrusting, paranoid, and hyper vigilant to the behaviour and body language of any people, especially men, around me. This could be on an airplane, in a train, at a supermarket: anywhere where I might be in close proximity with other people.

Sometimes I have a memory of being 'split in two', whereby my body below the chest is separated from everything above it. It's as if the physical area of the abuse is not part of me, has nothing to do with me, doesn't belong to me even, and mentally I am somewhere else entirely. The men might have told me this; that my penis was theirs to play with. I can't remember. There were times when the men hardly spoke to me; they just got on with what they wanted to do, with brief, abrupt instructions, and sometimes harsh judgements and threats.

Based on the number of locations I can now remember, thirteen all told that I can recall, and the fact that there were always at least two but usually three men involved each time, I was probably sexually abused, molested or raped at least 30 times. The men worked in rotation; whilst one would abuse me, another would either hold me or stand close by, and a third was a look out, in case we were disturbed... which happened a few times. I have a vivid memory, which is described in more detail later in this chapter, of being gagged by one of the men, when someone came in to use the urinal. I still clearly see the panic and fear in his eyes as he physically restrained and stared at me. I can also 'feel' the physical anxiety in his body which was forced against mine, and his smell, as I write this. The locations were public toilets in local parks, along the sea front, and on the beach of my home town.

Sitting here now in my flat, in a safe, quiet place, my awareness is heightened to the extent I am hyper vigilant and paranoid to sudden noises; and my body tenses at the irrational risk of the front door being kicked in and my being attacked in some way. I know it's irrational, but the mind and body automatically respond regardless; I've come to live with it. As soon as I am triggered, the reaction is immediate, and at its worst crippling. It's one of the symptoms of Complex PTSD.

Back then the parks were usually busy with kids, mostly unsupervised, playing football and cricket. There were two attractive parks near to where I grew up, separated by a road. The first park had a cricket pitch, old wooden pavilion, two open shelters, three separate toilets blocks, and plenty of open space. The second park was more organised; there was a traditional bowling green, children's play area, gatehouse, manicured gardens, and two toilet blocks. During the evenings, the toilets were known by everyone, including us children, to be regular pick up points for casual gay sex. Looking back, I think this acted as a cover for the paedophiles, as no one seemed to question why men were hanging around during the afternoon and early evening, when children were playing. Both parks had several gates and plenty of trees around the edges, which created easy access for the paedophiles to get in and out of the toilets quickly if they needed to. It was common for those who drove to park their cars around the corner, and to approach the toilets through trees rather than walk along the path, which was much more exposed.

When one is abused so many times, one gets to know paedophile behaviour. I remember seeing them park up, and walk to the toilets. This contrasts with the innocence of the setting: children playing, people walking dogs, and others sitting on benches watching the world go by. But it was the ideal environment in which a group of predatory paedophiles could operate: they could watch children playing and develop a strategy to groom the ones they thought were more susceptible. I was one of those children. I was a good footballer, and as I loved scoring goals and showing off... this was their opening....

[If you'd like to read the full book –](#)

[A Small Boy Smiling is available on Amazon](#)



A final message of thanks from Matt....

Thank you for reading this excerpt from my book, *A Small Boy Smiling*.

If you are a survivor of abuse I do hope my story might offer some encouragement on your healing journey. It has been hugely important for me to know that I am not alone, and that there are professional organisations, charities and voluntary groups offering support.

A Small Boy Smiling also covers my alcoholism and recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous; my search for spiritual truth in India and Brazil; my career in the professional theatre; and how I have found a deeper acceptance and peace within myself about the abuse.

I welcome comments and feedback, in particular from fellow survivors, educators and mental health professionals. Please feel free to [contact me](#).

Thank you,
Matt Carey