

The background is a light pink color. It is decorated with several teal-colored leaf patterns, each with a white outline. There are also large, solid orange circles scattered throughout the design. The text is centered in a white horizontal band.

DEFY TRAUMA EMBRACE JOY

By Rebekah Brown



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Written by
Rebekah Brown

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A repeating pattern of teal-colored leaves and branches on a light pink background. The leaves are stylized with white outlines. Some larger, solid orange shapes are interspersed within the pattern.

**“THIS IS THE
DANCE THEY
ALWAYS DO.”**

A large teal-colored leaf branch with white outlines, positioned in the top right and bottom right corners of the page. A large, solid orange shape is centered on the right side of the page.

**PART ONE
DEFY TRAUMA**



FRED & GLORIA

Sitting in church one Sunday, I noticed our seventy-nine year old organist as he entered the sanctuary. Bent with age, he seemed tired as he wearily placed one foot in front of the other.

“Good morning, Fred. How are you today?”

He shook his head. “Not so good. My wife got a call from her mother this morning.”

Puzzled, I wondered how that was possible. Fred and his wife, Gloria, were nearly eighty years old. How could Gloria’s mother still be living?

“My mother-in-law is ninety-eight years old,” he continued. “She lives in an assisted living facility here in town. I can always tell when Gloria has had a conversation with her. It’s been this way our entire marriage. One phone call, and Gloria is off for days.” Fred stared at the ground. “It’s not going to be a good day.”

I could not believe what I was hearing. A stab of anxiety went through my stomach.

“You mean, Gloria and her mother are not getting along?”

“Oh it’s far worse than that,” Fred stated. “This is the dance they always do. It’s been going on for as long as Gloria and I have known each other.”

I swallowed hard. Suddenly, Gloria came rushing into the sanctuary. “Fred, Fred,” she screeched waving her hands in a frantic motion. “We’ve simply got to stop by and see mother after church. She’s having problems with the staff again. Oh, Lord, I don’t know how I’m going to get through the service.” Gloria didn’t wait for Fred’s reply as she hurried to find a seat at the front. Fred turned away and crept toward the organ, preparing his music for the upcoming service.

Fred and Gloria had lived an entire life, raised children, were professionally accomplished and had now entered their retirement years. And still, Gloria’s mother tormented her. I sat down in stunned silence. The look on my face was the same one Gloria had.

A black cloud of doom dropped from the ceiling. I had struggled with my relationship with my parents for years. In that moment, I realized the manipulation, guilt, coercion and abuse would never stop. If I didn’t do something, it was going to follow me to the grave. I looked over at Gloria. I did not want to end up like her.

As Fred opened his music and Gloria continued her nervous twitching, I made a decision. I was going to defy trauma, no matter what it would cost.



**“I MADE A DECISION.
I WAS GOING TO DEFY
TRAUMA, NO MATTER
THE COST.”**

THE THREE PRINCIPLES OF FREEDOM

Confusion, self-doubt and terror kept me chained to abuse for many decades. My mother was mentally unstable, violent, self-destructive and cruel. My father, a full-blown narcissist, berated, controlled and bullied.

Though I had been an adult for many decades, destructive patterns from childhood continued to dictate my life. I thought I was condemned to live in depression and hopelessness. Life was something to be endured not enjoyed. Achievements and celebrations were temporary and joy was unimaginable. Nothing could reach my heart. I believed there was something inherently wrong with me and the fault for my suffering was mine alone.

As I came to understand how abusive family systems work, how trauma affects the brain, and how practical techniques bring real healing, I slowly began to come out of the fog. My defiance of trauma had begun. I am not condemned to live the life my abusers chose for me. I have the power to choose something different.

With these thoughts in mind, I would like to introduce you to three principles of freedom.

**“I AM NOT CONDEMNED TO LIVE
THE LIFE MY ABUSERS CHOSE
FOR ME. I HAVE THE POWER TO
CHOOSE SOMETHING DIFFERENT.”**



NO. 1

THE PRINCIPLE OF TRUTH

Truth is the property of being in accord with fact and reality. This is the opposite of a narcissistic system. Whether you find these traits in your family of origin, another significant relationship, or an institution, they all have one thing in common. Truth is what the narcissist says it is. Narcissists create a false reality and demand that you participate in that reality. This is how they gain control, and it is the foundation of any abuser's power. If a narcissist can affect your basic belief system and bend it to their will, they can control everything about you. Even your thoughts.

“NARCISSISTS CREATE A FALSE REALITY AND DEMAND THAT YOU PARTICIPATE IN THAT REALITY. THIS IS HOW THEY GAIN CONTROL, AND IT IS THE FOUNDATION OF ANY ABUSER'S POWER.”

TRUTH RULES FOR NARCISSISTS

- NO 1** I will allow no truth except my own.
- NO 2** I will lie, even when confronted with the truth.
- NO 3** I will use harassment, violence and threats to distort the truth.
- NO 4** I will use criticism and questioning to distort the truth.
- NO 5** I will use other's agreement with my truth to attack you.

NO. 2

THE PRINCIPLE OF PERSONHOOD

Autonomy means the right to exist as a separate person with your own ideas and the ability to make your own decisions. Existence is sacred. Respecting another's boundaries and the right to exist is a transcendent, irrefutable law. It is this very law the narcissist attempts to attack. An abuser cannot allow autonomy. Personhood is a threat to the abuser's ability to control. They demand your subjugation in order to plug in to their constructed world view where they are the best, the brightest, the most talented and in fact...God-like. The narcissist sees only himself. Your personhood is obliterated. They are not interested in your opinion or your talents or your life. You are valuable only in so much as you agree with their lies. They arrange family roles to suit their own needs. Children exist to serve the narcissist not the other way around. There is no empathy and love is often used as a weapon to get what they want.

“THE NARCISSIST SEES ONLY HIMSELF. YOUR PERSONHOOD IS OBLITERATED. THEY ARE NOT INTERESTED IN YOUR OPINION OR YOUR TALENTS OR YOUR LIFE. YOU ARE VALUABLE ONLY IN SO MUCH AS YOU AGREE WITH THEIR LIES. “

PERSONHOOD RULES FOR NARCISSISTS

- NO 1** You exist to make me happy.
- NO 2** You are to blame for my problems.
- NO 3** You need my approval in order to make a decision.
- NO 4** You are a failure.
- NO 5** You will never be able to get away from me.

NO. 3


THE PRINCIPLE OF LIFE

Narcissists are doom sayers. Their view of life can be summed up in one word...negative. They cannot enjoy anything and they cannot stand for you to enjoy anything. This negativity exists on the surface, but the deeper, often silent message centers around a destructive view of life itself. Everything will go wrong. The world is a dangerous place. You must listen to the narcissist in order to navigate it. In fact, the narcissist will often use the inferred idea that unless you do what they say, you are destined for destruction. Obliterated. You cannot exist without the narcissist's blessing, which is the one thing you will never achieve.

“THE NARCISSIST WILL OFTEN USE THE INFERRED IDEA THAT UNLESS YOU DO WHAT THEY SAY, YOU ARE DESTINED FOR DESTRUCTION. OBLITERATED. YOU CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT THE NARCISSIST'S BLESSING, WHICH IS THE ONE THING YOU WILL NEVER ACHIEVE.”

LIFE RULES FOR NARCISSISTS

- NO 1** Life is something to be tolerated not enjoyed.
- NO 2** Life is dangerous.
- NO 3** Life is hopeless
- NO 4** Life cannot be navigated independently.
- NO 5** Life does not come with choices.

A repeating pattern of teal leaves and orange circles on a light pink background. The leaves are stylized with white outlines, and the circles are solid orange.

**“I KNEW MY
MOTHER WOULD
BE FURIOUS,
BUT I SMILED DOWN
DEEP INSIDE. I WAS
FREE FOR A FEW,
BRIEF MOMENTS...”**

A light pink background with a large orange circle in the center. Teal leaves with white outlines are scattered around the circle.

**PART TWO
EMBRACE JOY**

THE MUMFORDS

As a youth activity one Christmas, our community sponsored a scavenger hunt. Since we lived in a rural area, the activity was to be done by car. The teenagers divided themselves into groups of four with an adult driver for each group. To my mother's chagrin, I chose to ride with Sarah Mumford. There were few people in the world my mother hated more than Sarah.

She and her husband Robbie had six kids and were as wild as a summer breeze. They drove a rattle-trap car and rented a junky, old house that was nearly falling down. Everyone knew when the Mumford's were coming. You could hear their laughter a mile away. Oblivious to the opinions of the neighborhood, Sarah didn't give two figs about the town gossip, and she cared less than that about what my mother thought. My mother loved to express her disdain over Sarah's long hair and the peace necklace's she sported, but to me, they were glorious. The entire family was noisy and obnoxious and I loved them.

Sarah and her group of teenagers made a half-hearted attempt to participate in the scavenger hunt, but it wasn't long before Sarah became bored. She had no idea what the clues meant nor did she seem to care.




"Hey kids. How bout we ditch this and stop over at my house. I just finished all the decorations and we've got loads of cookies and Christmas treats."

The carload of teenagers was all for it. We passed the scavenger hunt winners comparing clues in the church parking lot and continued on to the Mumford house. I knew my mother would be furious, but I smiled down deep inside. I was free for a few, brief moments, and I could blame it all on Sarah Mumford. The littlest Mumfords gave a raucous greeting as we clambered up the front porch steps. What awaited inside was beyond my wildest imaginings.

The entire downstairs had been transformed into a forest. I don't mean a Christmas tree in each room. I mean the house had disappeared and the Christmas trees had

taken over. The smell of fresh pine and cedar was accented with live candles and covered in hundreds of shimmering glass icicles. Sarah had covered every branch of every tree with frothy Ivory Snow soap that sparkled like real snow. The scent of apple cinnamon cider wafted beneath my nose as we were escorted into the kitchen for a feast. I will never forget the breath-taking scene in the Mumford house, nor the way my mother frowned when she came to pick me up. I stared out the car window as she made fun of Sarah Mumford's stupidity and the fact that none of us could figure out a single scavenger hunt clue. The joke was on my mother. She didn't understand me any better than she did Sarah Mumford.

Narcissistic abusers destroy joy. They hate it. The very essence of what makes life worth living is repugnant to abusive people. I've never forgotten that beautiful, life-giving scene at Sarah Mumford's house and I determined, even then, that I would not live the life my abusive parents had marked out for me. I was going to escape and escape I did.



**“NARCISSISTIC ABUSERS
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TO ABUSIVE PEOPLE.**

NO. 1

THE JOY-FILLED PRINCIPLE OF TRUTH

Truth sets you free and joy is your companion on the journey. When you begin to exit the fog of fear, obligation and guilt, you will see your family system or other relationships for what they really are. At long last, joy will have an opportunity to speak. Things you had long-puzzled over will begin to make sense. Fear that held you in bondage will begin to fade. Walking into the light of truth, you will see the evil system for what it is; nothing but a house of cards built on a pack of lies.

“WHEN YOU BEGIN TO EXIT THE FOG OF FEAR, OBLIGATION AND GUILT, YOU WILL SEE YOUR FAMILY SYSTEM OR OTHER RELATIONSHIPS FOR WHAT THEY REALLY ARE. AT LONG LAST, JOY WILL HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK.”

AUTHENTIC TRUTH RULES

- NO 1** Truth is not arbitrary
- NO 2** Abusers are not the sole authority of truth
- NO 3** Truth is transcendent.
(beyond the range of human experience and/or from a higher authority)
- NO 4** Truth is the abuser’s central point of attack
- NO 5** Truth is never coercive but always sets you free

NO. 2

THE JOY-FILLED PRINCIPLE OF PERSONHOOD

We matter because we breathe. That's how my mother-in-law treats my husband, her son. He is cherished because he exists. This is the essence of joy. Joy delights, celebrates, and encourages personhood. As we turn away from the cynical, bleak pronouncements of the narcissist, we find that deep inside, the greatest treasure in all the world is the human heart. That type of deep-felt confidence shatters the warped and evil power of an abuser. You will see the lies for what they are and they will no longer have the power to wound your soul.

**“JOY DELIGHTS, CELEBRATES, AND
ENCOURAGES PERSONHOOD.”**

AUTHENTIC PERSONHOOD RULES

- NO 1** You matter because you exist.
- NO 2** The only person you are responsible for is yourself.
- NO 3** The only person you can control is yourself.
- NO 4** You have the right to choose your own life
- NO 5** You have the power to choose your own life

NO. 2

THE JOY-FILLED PRINCIPLE OF LIFE

“At the center of creation is a smile.” This quote, attributed to C.S. Lewis, expresses the very essence of joy. Despite all the suffering and evil that exists in the world, at the very center of creation’s intention is joy.

For most of my life, I slogged through the mire of crazy-making, gaslighting attacks. Sexual abuse and violence were the things that wrote on the pages of my heart. Life wasn’t even tolerable much less joyful. How many times I wished I had never been born and cried out to God to let me die. But I was living the perspective of my abusers. They had lied to me. Their dark aberration of life was untrue.

Life really is a gift and is inherently good. There is so much to be enjoyed and savored: Relationships, nature, food, trips, beauty, the list is endless.

**“LIFE REALLY IS A GIFT AND IS
INHERENTLY GOOD.
THERE IS SO MUCH TO BE ENJOYED
AND SAVORED.”**

AUTHENTIC RULES ABOUT LIFE

- NO 1** Life is to be enjoyed.
- NO 2** Life is beautiful.
- NO 3** The random nature of life is an acceptable risk.
- NO 4** Life is temporary.
- NO 5** I create the life I want to live.

CONCLUSION


LET US GROW

I know from personal experience how difficult the journey of healing can be. Lists of rules and ideas are only a starting point. The journey you take toward your heart's true home will be unique. I am pulling for you and so are millions of others who have been abandoned, harmed, maligned and abused. Every step toward joy is a victory.

The narcissist would have you live in a fog of their creation. While they pretend to be God, they intentionally violate the integrity of truth, personhood and life. My abusive family system looked at everything through a cloud of depressed, defeatist thinking. No matter what the situation, my mother could find something bleak about it. My father was the most cynical man I ever met. Narcissists call into question our very right to exist, but abusers do not have special insight. In fact, the exact opposite is true. They have no insight. Narcissists twist the concepts of truth, personhood and life because they are too cowardly to face their own pain.

The principles of truth, personhood and life will always prevail no matter what kind of temporary power an abuser has. Age and time destroy temporary things. Joy, love and peace are eternal. Narcissists grow into miserable, lonely old people. Let us grow into people who have survived and overcome. Who bring joy into the world and peace into our hearts. This is our calling. This is the mission. To love and be loved with all that we are and all that we have and all that we hope to be.

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**“THE JOURNEY YOU TAKE TOWARD
YOUR HEART’S TRUE HOME WILL BE
UNIQUE. I AM PULLING FOR YOU AND SO
ARE MILLIONS OF OTHERS. EVERY STEP
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