

Interview with Marjorie McKinnon, author of *REPAIR Your Life: A Program for Recovery from Incest & Childhood Sexual Abuse*

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is pleased to be joined by Marjorie McKinnon, who is here to talk about her new book, “REPAIR Your Life: A Program for Recovery from Incest & Childhood Sexual Abuse.”

Marjorie McKinnon chose to write “Repair Your Life” after recovering herself from incest and sexual and physical abuse as well as finding that her children had been sexually abused. After many years in 12 step programs, including both Incest Survivors Anonymous and Co-Dependents Anonymous, and recovery programs such as Alternatives to Domestic Violence, she decided to bring her message to others suffering from abuse. She is here to discuss her amazing survival story and to give hope to others who need help in their recovery from abuse.

Tyler: Welcome, Marjorie. I’m very happy to have you here today. Your story is certainly a traumatic, but ultimately an inspirational one. To begin, will you tell us about the kind of abuse you experienced in your own life?

Marjorie: That would be difficult to tell in one sentence or even in one paragraph, but I think it’s important to give an overview of all of it so that others reading this will be able to identify.

When I was 13 my father came into my bedroom in the middle of the night and raped me. When I screamed for help over and over, my mother, who was a sound sleeper, came into the bedroom to comfort me, saying I’d had a nightmare. No matter how many times I sobbed that someone had been on top of me and done something so painful and so awful, she continued to say it was just a nightmare.

A few weeks later, I awoke from a sound sleep to hear my parents arguing. My mother had discovered Dad’s middle of the night raids and had him wake me up to be interrogated. When I refused to tell her what had happened (I wasn’t sure myself as I knew nothing about sex—I thought you bought babies at a hospital—and I had a fear that if I spoke of it our family would fall apart) she had him beat me until I confessed to it being my fault. This abuse continued until, at the age of 18 after a beating that almost killed me, I stuffed a few things into a pillow sack and ran.

During the next twenty-seven years I went from one abuser to another. My first husband, the father of my four children, was an alcoholic; my second, an alcoholic who openly cheated on me, was physically, mentally and emotionally abusive to me and, as I was to find out halfway through recovery, sexually abused my two older daughters starting when they were four and five years old. In my early twenties, I was twice hospitalized in a psychiatric ward, once for a failed suicide attempt. For twelve years, after the divorce from my second husband, I was sexually promiscuous, finding in that the only way to validate my worth. I drank too much and continued my pattern of being only with men who were abusive and alcoholic.

In my early 40s, I became engaged to the only decent man I’d ever known, my daughter’s father-in-law. His only goal in life was to make me happy. He couldn’t figure out why someone as wonderful as he thought I was would have wound up with so many abusive men. He became convinced that something bad had happened to me in my childhood. The more he probed for the truth the angrier and more panic stricken I became. I’d always known something bad had happened to me but had amnesia for large parts of my teen years. My father had confessed twice when I was in my mid-thirties to what he referred to as our incest relationship but had commented, “It wasn’t

so bad. They do it in the Appalachians all the time.” I had no idea what he was referring to and thought vaguely that incest had something to do with the Bible.

I tried to break off the relationship with Chuck but he said he’d never leave me except through death. I gave him his ring back and when that too did nothing to make him leave, I began having an affair with a married man. A few months later Chuck was diagnosed with lung cancer. My shame was so great that I ended my affair and decided to take care of him while he was dying. Even then, a few days before he died I was again in bed with a married man. This encounter would ultimately cause me to lose my mind.

Chuck died and within weeks I was living with the man who would ultimately set off a trail of such severe abuse that I had to choose between entering recovery and death. Having read my private journals without permission, he used my descriptions of previous lovers and infidelities as a whip to taunt me, especially the night I had spent in bed with a married man while Chuck lay dying. Like Pavlov’s dog, every time he rang the bell by shaming me about my past, I obeyed whatever his current demand was, for I learned quickly that giving-in caused the torment to cease. Subject to his whims, I lived like a prisoner, his several-times-a-day sexual addiction—which quickly turned into brutal rapes—his need to control what I wore, who I spoke with, what I said, and even whether I laughed or not, crippling me. My addiction to him was so bad that if he moved out, something he threatened to do whenever I wouldn’t do something he wanted, I would vomit and dry heave, shake with continual tremors and could barely speak. In order to get him to come back home I would agree to anything he demanded.

Within months my beautiful home looked like a battle ground with bathroom doors he had split in half when I cowered behind them hiding from his rages and sexual obsessions, broken furniture and holes in walls, all evidence of my out-of-control emotions from the terror of his rapes. Once he forced me to make sex videotapes by taunting me about previous infidelities. In the process, I lost my mind as I lay in a fetal position on the floor calling for my mother. Before we’d been together a year, his need for frequent middle-of-the-night sex was causing painful and confusing flashbacks.

Despite all this, I married him knowing that once again I was putting my neck in a noose. A few days after we were married, I found out that he had sexually abused his sister from the time she was five till she was fifteen. He had also sexually abused his daughter, a beautiful teenager who had been in and out of one psychiatric ward after another for most of her teen years.

In addition to the abuse I was going through in my private life, I was going through it at work. My boss was trying to get me to be sexually involved with him. Eventually I initiated a sexual harassment suit. At one point during my recovery I lived in a women’s shelter in an attempt to rid myself of the addiction I had to my husband. It didn’t work.

Tyler: At what point did you realize it was time to deal with the matter, that you needed to get help and to begin your recovery?

Marjorie: A few months into the relationship with my last abuser my family doctor, who had been convinced for years that my father had sexually abused me, insisted I get into recovery. I had been living on sleeping pills and anti-depressants for many years. He said it was time and sent me to Marcie Taylor, a specialist in the field of childhood sexual abuse.

Tyler: What was the most difficult part of your recovery?

Marjorie: Trying to work my way through a program of my own devising while living in a domestic violence marriage. It was like trying to swim upstream with heavy chains wrapped around me. Having to go through the sexual harassment at work made it even harder.

Tyler: Marjorie, what I find most interesting about your story above is that when you found a good man who treated you well, you still chose to be with abusers. Why do you think that is? It seems common that women who have been abused seek out abusive men? Can you shed any light on why that occurs, at least in your own experience?

Marjorie: Children who have been sexually abused has such low self-esteem that they are unable to love someone who treats them well. They don’t feel they deserve it but would rather die than admit that. They are so used to abuse that the idea of someone not abusing them is too uncomfortable. Also, keep in mind, most child sexual abuse

survivors can't recognize the situation they are in as abuse. In my case, my first husband wasn't an alcoholic, he just sometimes drank too much but then doesn't everyone. When Chuck (the man who treated me so well) and I were first together he wanted to help with the household chores; he said it was a 50-50 relationship. I became angry and didn't want him to help. There is also an element of danger that seems normal to a CSA victim. They lived with it as a child and are attracted to it as an adult. Keep in mind that so many of these "truth" are not clear to someone who was sexually abused as a child. They literally don't know how to walk to the other side of that bridge. "There are none so blind as he who cannot see."

Tyler: I mentioned you attended both sexual abuse recovery groups and co-dependents anonymous. What is the role of co-dependency in sexual abuse incidents?

Marjorie: Codependents bear all the scars of child sexual abuse. They have low self-esteem. They are hyper-vigilant and afraid to trust. They are caretakers, assuming responsibility for everything. They are afraid to ask for help. Their communication is indirect; clear communication is too frightening for them. They are perfectionists and learn to walk on eggshells. They are afraid to leave abusive relationships and feel that somehow they are responsible for it all. The list is very long. It is all unhealthy behavior that ultimately leads to unhappy lives and an early onset of physical health problems. The biggest percent of them suffered from some kind of child abuse, a perfect set up for later domestic violence.

Tyler: Having experienced sexual abuse yourself, how did you feel when you realized your children were also victims of sexual abuse?

Marjorie: The night that my youngest daughter called, waking me out of a sound sleep, screaming, "Mama, Mama, I've been raped" was the worst night of my entire life. Teri was seventeen and working at a fast food restaurant when a masked bandit made his way in and raped her at gunpoint. I felt as if my heart were being torn out.

Years later, while I was in recovery, I was talking to Teri about what my dad had done to me and how difficult it was to believe it even though he had told me about it. I told her that Mike, my son who was an officer on the LAPD, refused to believe it. She said Cathy and Tammie, my two older daughters certainly believed it especially after what Eddie had done to them. My heart stopped as confusion set in. What was she talking about? Then, in halting words, saying she was so sorry, but she thought I knew he had sexually molested them while we were married, she told me what had happened. Hastily, I called first Tammie, then Cathy and both admitted in quiet words what had happened to them telling me it wasn't my fault. It didn't matter. The guilt and the grief were overwhelming.

Tyler: Will you tell us about The Lamplighters? How did it get started and what is its mission?

Marjorie: When I was in the deepest, darkest part of my recovery, living with constant abuse, both at home and at work, I thought I couldn't go on, that death was preferable to what I was going through, and I cried out one time, "I wish I had a Lamplighter, someone who could show me the way to get well." During the early part of my recovery, I had two more failed suicide attempts. One day I was returning to work after my lunch break. I stood on the curb of a major street and saw a large semi-truck coming towards me. In a flash I thought, "If I throw myself in front of this truck it will be all over. There will be no one here to stop me from killing myself." As the truck approached I threw my body forward. Someone grabbed the back of my shirt and pulled me back. I felt the rush of the wind from the truck as it passed. I felt my feet teetering on the edge of the curb. I was furious and turned around to give a tongue-lashing to whoever had interfered. There was no one there.

That was a major turning point in my recovery.

When I went back and re-read my first person account I decided that when I was finished with recovery I would create a support group called the Lamplighters. I traveled to my father's grave four hours north of where I lived and spent the entire day screaming at him, angry for what he had done. I was an emotional wreck at the end of the day, but all my anger, all my fear had been laid on the cement slab under which he had been buried. Before I left I told him if he wanted to do penance in any way to make it up to me for the damage he had caused, he would help me get Lamplighters all around the world. He would help me get my books to the public so that others could be helped, so that what had happened to me would have a purpose. Years later when I started the Lamplighters, the first chapter other than the chapter in the small town where I currently live was formed in the town of International Falls, MN. It was the town where my father had delivered me so many years ago. The gal who wanted to start the chapter was unaware of that and invited me to do a series of speaking engagements in their town. I did so and spent time

looking for the house where I was born. It was gone now, but I stood on the sidewalk looking at the empty lot where it had been and felt a purpose in my life having gone full circle.

Tyler: That's so wonderful, Marjorie. It's like poetic justice in a positive way. Marjorie, you have also written a children's version of "Repair Your Life." Will you tell us why you felt it necessary to do so?

Marjorie: So many children have been sexually abused. The statistics are numbing. These children need help. There is little help available to them that can heal this wound. If we don't help them by having them go through a program that will heal them, they will grow up with behavior patterns that their children will adopt, setting them up also to be victims, thereby continuing this deadly multi-generational epidemic. I believe that the children's version of REPAIR Your Life is the program that can do this.

Tyler: Will you explain to us about the techniques in the book? I understand REPAIR is used as an acronym in the book for the process.

Marjorie: Yes. To me one of the most amazing things about this program is the name. It literally means to repair or mend something that's been broken, an apt description for a victim of child sexual abuse. When I began writing the program the stages fell in line naturally as if the word Repair had been waiting for that exact moment.

First we have:

R which is for Recognition: Recognizing and accepting that your adult problems stem from child sexual abuse. A lot of people (like me) despite having evidence that they have been sexually abused as a child still refuse either to believe it happened or even if they do, they don't believe it is the culprit in the problems they are having in their adult life. Some think, "Better the devil I know than the devil I don't." A myriad of reasons keep them from starting a recovery program. In this part of the program, I help them to accept what happened and encourage them to decide on a program of commitment.

E which is for Entry: Entering a program of commitment to change your life for the better. Here I show them the choices and how to make healthy ones regarding therapists, recovery groups, books, tapes, etc.

P is for Process: Learning tools and techniques that will enable you to become healthy. For example, The Magic Mirror. As you go through the program you will eventually be making lists not only of all of your shame but of all the unhealthy messages you received as a child both overt and subliminal. These will, little by little, be replaced by your Magic Mirror sayings. Here you gather positive sayings (such as, "The only thing that's the end of the world is the end of the world.") and tape them on to your mirror at home. You read them every day as you are looking in the mirror, literally reprogramming yourself with healthy messages. By the time you finish recovery your mirror should be littered with yellowed pieces of paper, their corners curling.

A is for Awareness: The coming together of reality as, using more techniques, you gather the pieces of the broken puzzle your life became, and begin assembling them to see the complete picture. Here you discover the properties of awareness that were God-given promises at birth, lost at the moment of childhood sexual abuse.

I is for Insight: Here, with more exercises and techniques you see the complete picture and beginning to return to that which you were prior to being sexually violated.

R is for Rhythm: Developing and returning to the natural rhythm you had before the incest happened, the blue print that is the essence of your true nature, becoming who you really are.

The REPAIR program uses "The Bridge of Recovery" as a visual tool. They must cross that bridge as they go from pain, shame, suicidal tendencies, eating disorders etc. to a place of great joy, stability, healthy choices etc.

Tyler: What about this program is different or most helpful compared to 12 step programs or other forms of recovery available?

Marjorie: REPAIR addresses issues specific to child sexual abuse survivors such as weak boundaries, multi-generational child sexual abuse victimization and unhealthy shame. While other forms of child abuse can also create these problems, in a child sexual abuse victim, the tie between the abuse and the unhealthy result is easier to

understand and thereby easier to address. It makes sense. The REPAIR program offers techniques and exercises that are needed to take the survivor across the Bridge of Recovery. 12 step programs rely on group participation to make them work. The REPAIR program can be used by itself. This is important for survivors of child sexual abuse because the shame of what happened is so great that being in a group of strangers, especially a group where the problems they are trying to overcome can be of multiple origins, can be overwhelming. In working the REPAIR program, once a survivor feels they would like to join a Lamplighter Chapter, they would be joining others who have the same origin for the problem they are trying to overcome. This makes the shame easier to deal with. The identification with another and what they are trying to overcome is so clear.

Tyler: I understand you are actually the author of numerous other books. Will you tell us a little about your other writing?

Marjorie: Yes. I've been writing for 25 years. My first book was a mystery novel called "When First We Practice to Deceive." During recovery I wrote about what had happened to me knowing it couldn't possibly have a happy ending but I kept on writing anyway. The ending was beyond anything I had even dreamed about and the name of that book is: "Let Me Hurt You and Don't Cry Out," which to me is the war cry of the perpetrators. Today I'm the happiest person I know. After recovery I spent three years developing and researching "Repair Your Life." The next book I wrote was a novel called "The Box" which was followed by two sequels, "The Stone" and "The Photo," both of which are time-travel novels. Next came "A Common Sense Spiritual Path" which was meticulously researched. Actually, the majority of my books were researched extensively especially the trilogy. Then I wrote "Mystical Experiences: Tales of the Inner Light" which is a collection of stories about strange things that have happened to me—supernatural events. The last novel is called "Here Lies," the story of six women who bond after finding out they are deceased and now live in a cemetery. Each one hopes to get their specific questions answered by St. Peter and each one, in the bonding and meshing they do with one another, finds a resolution that changes the components of their soul. It is irreverent, funny, sad, and ultimately joyful as Marybelle Varney becomes the undisputed leader of this pack.

I have three other books that are works in progress. "After the Rain" is a novel told by a young woman whose fiancé has died from cancer. He left her an incomparable legacy as she writes her story of their time together. "The Elderly: Our Greatest Asset" is a collection of stories about actual elderly people I interviewed to find out about their lives, especially a woman who was a concentration camp victim in World War II. Lastly, I'm compiling and editing the four volumes of emails Tom and I sent to each other during our courtship. It is called "Hello! My Name is Marjorie," which is the first line of the book. We had met on a genealogy website where we were both McKinnons. That began a sixteen month courtship while I lived in California and Tom lived in Colorado and at the ending we were married in Melrose, Scotland, taking our final vows at the Melrose Abbey ruins with British and Scottish friends (one of whom is a MacKinnon) in attendance.

Tyler: Wow, Marjorie. You have been busy. Marjorie, what advice do you have for someone who was abused or even is currently being abused and needs to know where to start to get help? What about if a person is not being abused but suspects someone else is? What can that person do to help the person being abused?

Marjorie: In answer to the first question. If people are in abusive situations, they need to see if there is a Crisis Center of any kind in their area; if need be, check into women's shelters. The operator usually has phone #s for those places. If they are afraid to leave, they should try to find a local support group. If there are no Lamplighter chapters near them (and they can check the website and email me at Margie@thelamplightrs.org to find out) they should call the operator for the closest CoDependency Meeting. It is a 12 step program that will give them support and help. If their abuse was in the past, they should still try to get into a Codependency Meeting and if possible a Lamplighter meeting. If sexual abuse is in their childhood at all they should order a copy of "REPAIR Your Life" and begin working the program. I am happy to answer any questions they have and provide any support they need. Just email me. I get emails all day long from people who need support. If people suspects that a friend is being abused, they should let them know what is available to help them. Try to educate them on what domestic violence is and can lead to, not only for themselves, but for their children. The Internet has a wealth of information on both domestic violence and child sexual abuse and especially can guide them to either a website or an organization that can help.

Tyler: Thank you, Marjorie for sharing your story with us today. Will you tell our readers about your website and what additional information they may find there about "Repair Your Life"?

Marjorie: The Lamplighter website is at www.thelamplightrs.org. It contains information on finding out whether they fit the profile of someone who has been abused, and it gives information on where the Lamplighter

Chapters are; it tells them how to start a chapter themselves (which is a great idea even if they are victims—sitting in a room with other survivors who are telling their stories and being able to tell their own story will go a long ways toward empowering themselves to get into a recovery program) will tell them how to order the book “REPAIR Your Life”—it is also available through Amazon.com and Barnes&Noble.com—it will share testimonies on both the Lamplighters and “REPAIR Your Life” from others who are familiar with what we’re trying to do and can attest to its usefulness. It lists the stages of REPAIR to show them what they will be going through if they buy the book and begin the program. And lastly, it has several links to other websites that can prove to be invaluable tools.

Tyler: Thank you, Marjorie, for sharing your story and using it to bring light to others. I wish you much happiness in your work.