



## Secrets

*How to Shed the Shame and Move into  
a Tranquil Life*

By Cynthia James

**All families have secrets, some of which, like a great fudge recipe, are fun to keep. Other family secrets, like the great-aunt who was an outlaw in the early West, become unimportant over time.**

Yet other types of secrets are much less benign. These secrets often revolve around abuse or traumatic experiences. They can affect generations of people in such profound ways that their abilities to achieve freedom and peace are limited. There are many people today who are carrying the baggage of guilt, shame and fear-based beliefs that keep them from moving forward in productive and fulfilling ways.

Some statistics shed light on the extent of the challenges posed by family secrets. Seventy-six million Americans have been exposed to alcoholism in families, and some of the children in these families assume the behaviors in self-destructive ways. Seventeen percent of divorces in the United States are caused by infidelity. An estimated thirty-nine million people are survivors of childhood sexual abuse. In the United States today, one in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before the age of sixteen. In eighty percent of reported sexual assaults, the victims are under thirty years old.

Surely these statistics are staggering, and all the more so because our willingness to report such troublesome events is a relatively new phenomenon. The reports of abuse have increased dramatically from the 1960s to the 2000s. A lot of us on the planet are baby boomers and even though this behavior was occurring in our homes, we were discouraged from experiencing our feelings surrounding these painful events. In fact, we were told things like “just pray,” or “put that behind you.” For those who dared to speak, many experienced punishment or were not believed and supported. What resulted was a large group of people forced to swallow their wounds and pain.

So where is all this going? To healing. I think that we are seeing dysfunctional behavior, we are seeing people doing self sabotaging and self destructive things. And I think there is a cry for healing. That is why self-help books are selling off the charts and that is why Wayne Dyer and Marianne Williamson and Deepak

Chopra are filling auditoriums because people want to know how to get to heal. How to get to living a life that is not run by this old stuff.

John Bradshaw wrote an illuminating book entitled Family Secrets. He wrote about the toxicity created through withholding secrets and discussed how patterns of denial, secrets, and betrayal can be passed down from generation to generation without being addressed.

While in a class at the University of Santa Monica, I was asked to track my genealogy in search of generational patterns. Fascinated with the assignment, I had numerous conversations with my mother and relatives about the family history and secured my grandmother's diaries. What I discovered was astonishing. Five generations of women in my family were physically and sexually abused. Many had been in multiple violent marriages and relationships. More importantly, NO ONE talked about it. Everyone held pieces of the puzzle, but there was an agreement (spoken and unspoken) to withhold this information. No one realized that keeping secrets could be destructive, anchoring the patterns into the DNA to be passed on generation after generation.

In the past 20 years, I have worked with many clients who have been dealing with the same issues. Often times, they remembered occasions when they would enter a room and the conversations would stop; relatives that no one would discuss; or questions dismissed about family members who suddenly disappeared. There was always this feeling that something was happening that was too awful to come into the light.

I worked with one woman who, at 72, told me that she had been raped multiple times by her employer and his sons when she was a teenager. She said that she kept it a secret because she was afraid of bringing danger to her family. She was finally sharing this with me because she realized that she had numerous violent relationships in her life and now she was watching her children and grandchildren repeat the same patterns. It was a revelation to her that something that happened so long ago could be affecting her family all these years later.

Here are some facts that might assist you or someone you know that is struggling with patterns that appear unsupportive. There might be secrets, ones that you hold or ones that are held in consciousness through generations of your family.

#### SECRETS CAN.....

- Create emotional and physical blocks
- Stop the flow of authentic communication
- Take enormous amounts of energy to maintain
- Create mental prisons and hold you hostage
- Create patterns that have long lasting and destructive behaviors
- Create lack of trust and failure to become intimate
- Create addictive habits to numb the pain

## TOOLS TO UNLOCK AND RELEASE THE PATTERNS

**EXPLORE FAMILY PATTERNS.** Look at those that are supportive and those that are not. Once you are clear about them you are at choice. You can choose to continue the pattern or opt to create new patterns that are more supportive of your growth and expansion.

**CREATE A SECRETS LIST.** This will include secrets you have been holding about your past, family secrets that you know about or secrets you are holding about friends or business acquaintances. This list will include things you are ashamed of or blame that has been passed on for generations. Take your time. This might take a few days to complete. I encourage you to meditate or become still before you add to the list. You might be surprised what comes forward.

**CONNECT WITH YOUR BODY.** Your body holds all of the secrets. As you read your list see how your body responds to the information. If it feels tight, tense or constricted in any area, this is an indication that your body is in need of support and release. There are statistics that support working out, yoga, walking, bike riding and free-form dancing as ways to release energy from the body.

**GET SUPPORT.** Contact your therapist, spiritual counselor, sponsor or friend that you trust. Read the list to them and then burn it as a symbol of surrender and release. Then create a plan of new choices and behaviors that will assist in breaking those old patterns for good. Ask your supporter to work with you to stay on track and honor your commitment to yourself.

Please remember that you are a powerful person and that no secret, large or small, has the power to keep you from living a dynamic and powerful life.