



By Stef Swink

The Possibility and Power of Healing

Photo by Karuka

Editor's note: This interview was recorded with permission from author Claudia Chotzen, and the questions and answers have been edited for clarity.

Through my 23 years as an active licensed practitioner focusing on spiritual mentorship, I have been honored to support and bear witness to incredible transformations and healing based on the Science of Mind teaching. As an example of what is possible, I share here an interview with one incredible woman I have been blessed to work with and her story of healing.

Claudia Chotzen and her book, "The Dark Room: A Memoir of Triumph," reveal the possibility and power of healing and thriving after experiencing a type of betrayal and abuse that remained unspoken for far too long.

Stef Swink: Tell me about your family's background that preceded your childhood growing up in Seattle in the 1950s and 1960s.

Claudia Chotzen: My parents were both born and raised in Germany and identified as Germans first and rarely as Jews. My mother thought she was "just an ordinary little German girl" until she was 11. Suddenly, she and her sister weren't allowed to participate in team sports, orchestra and other extracurricular activities.

Jews weren't allowed to go to public parks, playgrounds, swimming pools or theaters. Each school day started in an assembly in the auditorium with a collective salute, followed by Nazi songs, singing lyrics that translated to, "Sharpen the knives so the blood of the Jews can flow freely." My mother and her family fled this oppression and came to America in 1937.

My father's family lived in Germany for almost a century, esteemed members of their community. My father escaped when he was 27. His parents survived, but more than 40 of his closest relatives — aunts, uncles and cousins he had grown up with in Germany — were murdered in concentration camps.

SS: In your book, you reveal your personal experience of what you call "the last taboo." What do you mean by that?

CC: As an adult, I learned that my mother was molested by her father when she was a child, but she never got any professional help to heal. She continued that cycle of abuse with me when I was a child. There wasn't a cultural awareness in the 1950s and 1960s that sexual abuse was happening in "nice, educated families." No doctor or teacher recognized the signs of dissociation and abuse when I told them, "I'm not in my body."

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Today doctors, teachers and therapists know the indicators of abuse. However, the abuse that occurs when a mother molests is still not widely recognized. I call it “the last taboo.” Most cultures place mothers on pedestals. And they should be. Being a mother requires the most powerful kind of love imaginable. But sometimes that love gets twisted.

If we, as a culture, can admit that this happens, then we will be able to give these mothers the help they need and provide children who are suffering in pain and shame the resources to be heard.



Claudia Chotzen in 1972, on the road to her healing journey

SS: What was your greatest motivator to heal?

CC: A mother should be her child’s fiercest protector. Instead, mine became my greatest danger. How do you love a mother who abuses you and a father who stands silently by? I had no choice. I was a child living in their world. I don’t let my parents off the hook for what they did or for the harm they caused, but I have compassion for the trauma they experienced and passed on.

Most importantly, I came to realize that I didn’t want this to be the narrative that dominates my life. This is my history, a piece of who I am. But just because terrible things were done to me, I didn’t want it to define who I am. And I became a mother myself. I was determined to protect my children and stop the cycle of abuse.

SS: What was your biggest challenge in bringing your story to light?

CC: For years, two powerful forces continually existed in conflict within me. Part of me wanted to finally have a voice to tell the truth about what happened. The opposing force was my equally deep desire not to violate our family code of loyalty.

Growing up, our family was everything. We were all trained as children that having lost so many relatives in the Holocaust, we had

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a primary duty to love and preserve family. So even as an adult, even after the sexual abuse threat was gone, the terror remained that if I told my story, I would betray my family. My brothers and sisters and I remain close. I wanted to find my own voice to share my story, but I didn’t want to intrude on my siblings’ lives or retraumatize them.

SS: How did you overcome that?

CC: Lots of therapy. It took years of working through so many layers of pain and shame and hopelessness to finally publish this book. I had to address the deeply rooted fear that I would be ostracized or even annihilated if I told the truth. Consistent support from my husband, our sons, excellent therapists and close friends made all the difference.

Also, 40 years ago, I was introduced to Science of Mind. And I’ve been studying, working with practitioners, doing prayer treatments and living it every day since. It’s my spiritual foundation, guidance and inspiration.

SS: We did some deep exploration around your love and appreciation of this philosophy and its teachings, and a confusing inner conflict that came with that.

CC: One of the questions I had for years was how to reconcile Science of Mind’s tenet of “keeping our focus on what we want, not on what we don’t want” with my need to confront the horrific things that happened to me in order to heal. I understood the importance of claiming what you want and being positive, but I could not let go of needing to turn toward the darkness, to face the trauma — with support — in order to transform it.



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Today, Chotzen experiences the fullness of life and wants to share what she’s learned with others.

Now I understand more fully that this philosophy is really about freedom — the freedom to claim and live the truest essence of ourselves no matter what we have been through. So ultimately, I took this risk for freedom.

SS: What has been the most rewarding part of writing this book?

CC: A weight has been lifted. This journey took almost 20 years, and I feel like I'm a different person. And there have been so many miracles already. Instead of being ostracized by my family, the book opened up loving communication, a recognition of our shared history and an even more powerful bond with my siblings. Several of them confided how the book created opportunities for their own healing.

I've heard from readers who have also experienced trauma and abuse who told me it has given them hope and support to face darkness and secrets in their lives so they can come out on the other side. Individuals have asked me to participate with their book clubs. Therapists are sharing the book with their patients and colleagues.

And as a result of all the healing work I've done and continue to do, I'm happy. My life is filled with so much joy and love.

SS: Why was it so important to you to write this book?

CC: I know I am not alone in experiencing this type of abuse. I want people who have experienced any type of abuse, any situation that has left someone feeling shame, less than whole, without a voice, to know it is possible to live the full lives they deserve. But truly, and this has become clearer since I completed the book, the energy of the book is about so much more than just overcoming abuse. It is really about the power and the importance of turning toward that which has been hard, painful or difficult.

I wrote this memoir to find a way out of suffering, not to wallow in it. By telling my story, I found a voice that was taken from me as a child. My deepest wish is for the book to be of service to others and a beacon of hope. My vision is that it helps those who are feeling hopeless, thinking their abuse is their fault, feeling like the shame belongs to them, to find their voice, to heal and to be able to live a life filled with love. ☸

"The Dark Room: A Memoir of Triumph" by Claudia Chotzen is the story of growing up with parents who escaped the Holocaust and the story of growing up with a mother who violated the writer's trust and her body. Ultimately, the book is a testament to the ability to break the cycle of abuse, to thrive and to love. It's available on Amazon.com and Apple Books.

You Are a Woman of Power

"You are a woman of power." The first time I heard this was in 2017. I sat in the audience of the Science of Mind UK Conference, hanging on to every word of guest speaker Rev. Edwene Gaines. She reached into every heart in the room as she boldly introduced herself: "I am Rev. Edwene Gaines, and I am a woman of power." You could hear a pin drop as Gaines openly shared her journey of spiritual advancement and wealth creation. It's a gritty story of heartache and healing that stuck in my awareness.

Engaging with the idea of being a woman of power invited me into deeper self-inquiry. What does being a woman of power mean? What is required of me to live in the essence of woman-of-power consciousness? What came to me was a new song, "Woman of Power," and a greater realization that we are each — already and right now — dynamic women of power.

As we intentionally own our unique and individualized beauty, we expansively illuminate and give others permission to do so, too. We are already the light in the shadows, and when we forget this, there are practices to bring us back to truth: affirmative prayer, forgiveness, visioning, gratitude and meditation. We are love in action.

Mothering Sunday in the UK is a poignant time as we recognize our mothers, our ancestors, ourselves and the mother archetype. This sacred day invites us to nurture a deeper awareness of love. Mothering Sunday is aligned with the fourth Sunday of Lent, originally honoring Mother Mary and creation.

As Science of Mind adventurers, we have a great opportunity to use these teachings, with high awareness, simply and practically to benefit our everyday lives. Knowing that with each and every feeling, thought, intention, word and action, we co-create with the Divine to birth a new idea for our lives.

I've found it transformative to intentionally affirm every day that, "I am a woman of power." Take that affirmation into moving your body by searching for "Woman of Power Global Dance Mix" on YouTube. ☸



REV. LAURA TOPPER is based in the U.K. She shares the teachings of Science of Mind globally with her weekly broadcasts "The Cosmic Prayer Show," "The Women of Power Show" and "Wisdom of the Mystics" on New Thought Media Network.