

# *Romance and Healing*

## *Surviving Rape*

by *Monica Burns* © September 13, 2007

### *Need Immediate Help?*

[\*National Rape Crisis Center Locator\*](#)

### *Statistics*

- **Every two and a half minutes**, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted.
  - **One in six American women** are victims of sexual assault, and one in 33 men.
- 

On September 13, 2007, I made a post on my agent's blog. It was a post I'd been working on for some time. And by time, I mean that over the course of at least a year, I'd discussed the topic at length with my husband, close friends and my agent. I wavered between coming out into the open or staying hidden in the warmth and safety of keeping my own counsel.

I wrote my post for one reason only. I wanted to help other women like me. Even if it's only one woman who comes to believe in herself again, then standing with my soul naked and vulnerable in public will be worth it. My post on how my writing has helped in my ongoing healing process is directly below. *Monica*

---

Romance. I've been reading it since I was 12 years old. The first time I "fell in love" was when I read a Harlequin Romance. I think the name of that book was Beat of a Different Drum. Others romance books followed, and I believed in love's happily ever after with all my heart.

I believed it right up until the night I was raped by the man who'd taken me out for the evening and then decided he was entitled to something he wasn't. Right now you're probably gasping in shock. Me—I'm sitting here teary eyed, wondering how to frame my words in way that make sense and yet don't sound maudlin. I sit here wondering if sharing my experience is the right thing to do. Wondering if I really have the courage to post this. It's a direct confrontation with all the emotional ugliness that still lingers inside me. I also have no doubts that there will be sympathetic people and

those who will be cruel.

So why tell my story? I've considered doing so for some time now. I would read something about forced seduction or hear about the blurred line between erotic romance and erotica. I'd express my belief that while love and hope are constant themes running through romance, there is still a strong "fantasy" component in romance books. In all of those instances, I knew my experience had played a major role in shaping my opinions, but fear kept me from speaking out. I knew I'd be vulnerable, and I don't particularly like people seeing the chinks in my armor.

But little things prodded me closer toward this moment. Things like a friend reading one of my novellas then telling me afterward, that while reading my book she felt sexy for the first time in her life. I'd already begun to acknowledge that my writing was helping me overcome some of my sexuality issues, but here was a new twist. My writing had helped another woman feel sexy and beautiful. I found it to be a damn powerful statement. It made me wonder what sharing my experience might do to help more women feel better about themselves.

Women like me who have great difficulty trusting anyone, who resist physical intimacy and who question their self-worth. I wanted to share the message that it's possible to survive rape or domestic abuse and eventually develop a healthy romantic relationship with someone who loves you. I wanted to help other women understand that sex can be beautiful, fun, playful, loving and wonderful despite the past.

Was my "sex isn't bad" revelation easy to come by? Hell no! I've been married 21 years, and my biggest challenges throughout my marriage have been trust and intimacy. I struggle with those demons on a daily basis, and on occasion my husband has paid a high price because of my struggle. Even when you're with someone who loves you a lot, trust still doesn't come easily. And physical intimacy is based in deep emotional trust. The fact that my husband and I are still together is a testament to how much he loves me. I would have left me a hell of a long time ago.

I've had family comment that they don't understand how I can write explicit sex considering my past. Trust me; no one's been more surprised by that than me. I didn't expect writing erotic romance to be therapeutic, but it has been. It's helped me reclaim some of my self-worth. As an erotic romance writer, I believe that love and hope are integral themes in romance books. I can believe in those themes and yet remain true to my belief that strong fantasy elements are always prevalent in romance books. There's always the happy ever after, there's the hot, hunky hero and the lovely, sexy heroine. They both have issues, but they manage to work them out in the span of a book. They ride off into the sunset, leaving the reader with that feel good sensation. In real life, it

doesn't always work that way, but that's why I think romance books are so important. They give us hope. They make us feel good. They make us either believe in love or they give us hope that love might actually exist somewhere out there.

With erotic romance in particular, there is an even more powerful message. Erotic romance gives a woman a choice. She's empowered to read on or put a book down. She's able to explore her feelings about sex in a safe environment. In other words, she's in charge. If a book's content becomes too intense, walking away is perfectly fine. Erotic romance gives women permission to be vulnerable and explore subject matter that may be difficult for them. It's a safety net for the reader who's making a choice, not having something forced on her. When it comes to writing erotic romance, it's safe because I simply delete anything I find frightening or uncomfortable.

Has writing erotic romance washed away all my pain, all of the darkness? No. It's not some magical elixir. I'll always carry the pain and darkness of the rape inside me. What my writing has done is empowered me. I'm able to take back some of what was stolen from me. I find it easier to believe my husband when he tells me I'm a beautiful, sexy woman. Five years ago, I didn't believe a word of it. Does that mean I believe those words all the time? No, but with every page I write, it gets easier to believe I'm sexy, I'm beautiful and I'm worthy of being adored.

## ***Help For Rape Survivors***

Find a Rape Crisis Center near you  
[Rape Crisis Center Locator](#)

Sisters Together Assisting Rape Survivors  
Read about Liz Seccuro's story of survival and how she's helping others.  
[Sisters Together Assisting Rape Survivors](#)

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network - RAINN  
[Information, Donations, Events](#)