



Beyond the Shadows

Mrs. Sharon Marie Brunner

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Historical trauma is the culmination of centuries of genocide, discrimination and oppression. The Native American people have demonstrated steadfast resiliency against all the hardships inflicted upon them; however, many have not escaped the ravages of chronic trauma unscathed. As a race, they have suffered psychologically, spiritually, culturally, economically, and physically. In the days before the United States and Canada were settled by Europeans, there were no political boundaries. Many of the tribes consisted of nomadic hunters and gatherers. Weather and the availability of food sources played a role in deciding where the Anishanaabeg resided. Opposition about their economic, cultural and spiritual practices did not exist. For hundreds of years Native American people have been subjected to harsh acts of discrimination, which is still occurring today. Phrases such as "drunken Indians" are still being used. The children at the boarding schools were told their form of spirituality was barbaric, savage, and they were told they were less than human by people who shoved Christianity down their throats while they were sexually, emotionally, and physically abusing these poor children. The batterers told the battered they were undeserving of respect. The core feelings associated with trauma are feeling afraid and alone. Hence, mobilizing social support systems such as relatives, friends, and members of the community can play a major role in recovery. Trauma survivors need to be encouraged to tell their stories which will counteract the feelings of isolation. It also provides an opportunity to make sense of the traumatic experience(s). The more severe, complex, and chronic the PTSD symptoms are, the more difficult these symptoms are to explain or diagnose. Correctly answering the question "What happened?" in relationship to the trauma that was experienced may take a while to answer. And the question may refer to much of a person's childhood, allowing no brief answer. The stories, depending on the complexity of the trauma that was suffered, may be difficult to reconstruct. The stages of recovery involve establishing safety, reconstructing personal stories, mourning and integration. For anyone who has suffered various forms of trauma most of their lives, establishing a sense of safety may not be easy. A sense of safety may not occur at the beginning of the healing journey, it may be the end result. Many individuals were inflicted with some form of serious trauma during their lifetime and research has demonstrated the trauma faced by their ancestors also affects them today. This is referred to as intergenerational stress or historical trauma. Many Native American people today are plagued with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Substance Abuse, Depression and a whole host of other mental health issues. Gaining an understanding of what chronic oppression has done for many Native Americans and taking the steps to heal from unresolved trauma will help individuals flourish. Everyone has it within themselves to become healthier. Happiness is an obligation. Feeling grateful for what we have is the first step to achieving happiness. The other steps involve enhancing our communication skills, learning about our own personal culture, taking care of physical, spiritual, and emotional selves, establishing healthy boundaries, developing adequate coping skills, practicing mindfulness, enhancing our emotional intelligence skills, setting workable goals, becoming empowered, and realizing our valuable self-worth. We can gain better control of our lives by applying humor when possible and simplifying our lives. Community building involves putting forth effort to be a part of our community by volunteering. This book clearly describes what historical trauma is and what can be done to address the damage caused by the ravages of chronic abuse.

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