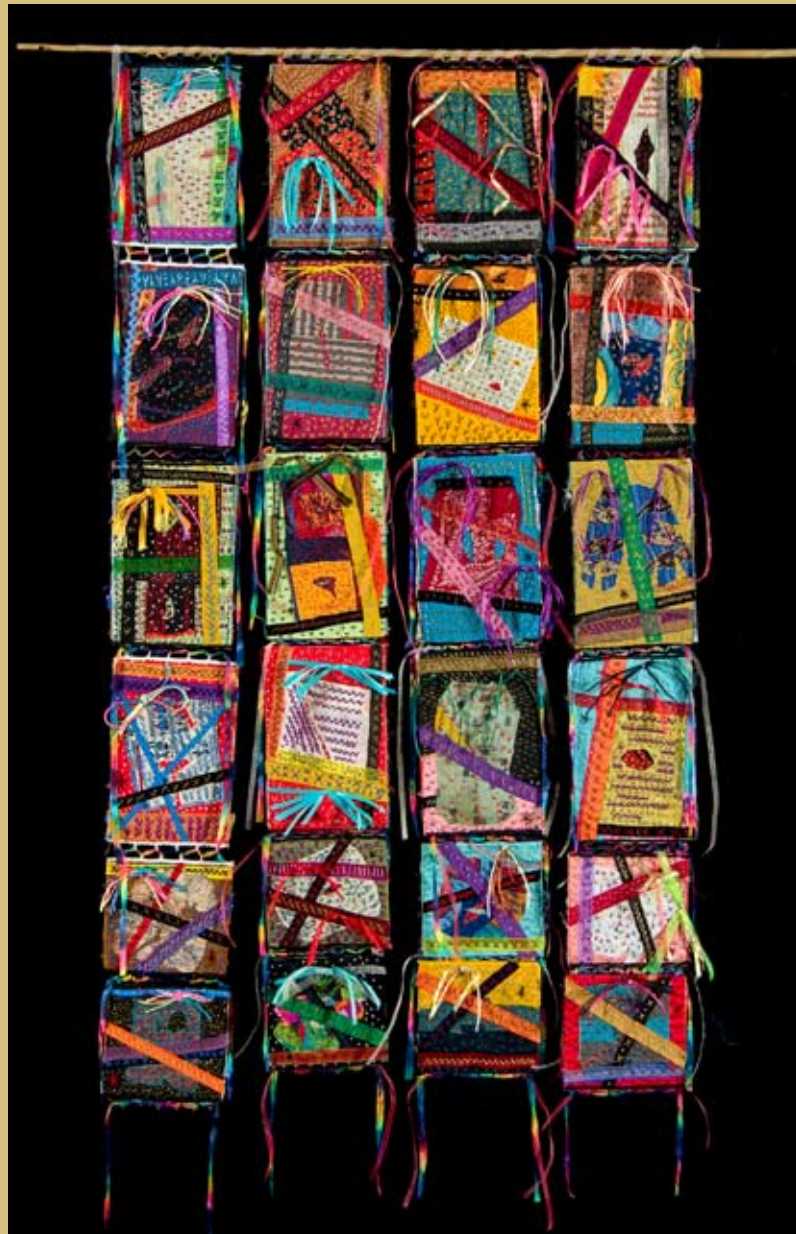


Sign of the Ribbons





1

Uncover. Courage. Open the door of your heart.
Heed the advice given in court.

“Change all your patterns, the ones you habitually followed when the marriage was still intact.

Do not go near or into any of the places where you once shopped, ate, walked, met friends, hung out.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

2

“Really? Is that true, to stay away from all the familiar places?”

“Yes.” answers the agency for abused women.

Yes. That is absolutely, definitely,
the way you will begin to regain your freedom, inside and out.

Yes. You must regain your essential safety
in the world, on the earth.”

With determination, fear and worry, the edicts are accepted.

3

“Yes”, the young woman in the agency answers to the question,
“Is this also abuse?”

“Yes, bullying, manipulation for power, creating isolation and playing mind games of doubt are abusive behaviors.”

All behaviors that inexorably and systematically attempt to control feelings, money, friends, family, work, body are abuse.

All actions that are directed towards force,
or the threat of force, are abusive.

This includes the two faced trick of showing a charming, smiling visage in public and a silent punishing, belittling one in private.

4

These are forbidden topics of conversations in polite company,
in public places. No.

They are not banned by law but by deeply internalized customs passed from generation to generation, land to land.

Yes. Women may be treated in deplorable ways and there shall be no true accounting.

Attempts to break the silences of complicity are deftly squelched before anything is said, or changed.

Be quiet. Speak to no-one. Put your head down.

Bow slightly to the side.

Deal with this alone, yourself.

When silence is accepted, silence rules.



5

In my modern western society there are a multitude of people paid to listen, to hear story upon story, to help in the process of recreating lives touched by the nasty dealings of abuse. Wonderful as the work of the professionals is for hurt women, they are a bonanza for the rest of society which can continue to avert its gaze and go about life as usual.

6

“Go to professionals” is the oft spoken dictum of those who inadvertently come into direct contact with abuse in marriages, (or elsewhere.) The subject, or more accurately, the reality is too difficult, too painful, and perhaps too close to home.

“Go to professionals.” “Take care of yourself”.

I declare. This is not okay. It is not adequate, not enough, and does not lead to substantive change for anyone – the women directly affected, their children, friends, relatives, perchance—yourself.

7

There is a club of women, known and unknown, a club with no name, a club of women afflicted by the malady of abuse and violence against them.

This club is enormous, uncounted, crossing boundaries of class, ethnicity, religion and country. Membership in this club is involuntary and not okay.

Condoning the existence of this club through silence is also not okay. Silence gives a powerful nod of acquiescence to the perpetuation of abuse upon women and the often devastating consequences: financial, physical, emotional and mental.

Silence permits the actions of life reconstruction to fall entirely upon the women who have been maltreated, and thus no reckoning is required.

8

May this secret club, members largely unknown to one another, become public to itself, the safety and integrity of its members held in high regard. No need for loud public proclamations that so often change remarkably little. Take this time, right now, to acknowledge all the women who have and are currently experiencing deliberately conceived acts of coercion, control and domination over their lives. These are the behaviors that condense into the accurate but insufficient word, ‘abuse’.



9

When she speaks, a woman freshly out from the onslaught
of fear and trepidation, believe her.

Be a friend to her.

Undo the constrictions resulting from the words of
warning given by the woman in the agency for abuse.

Many will not want to hear you speak.

Many will not believe what you say, your story.

Here, we believe you.

These words sound improbable.

Surely they are an exaggeration.

Not so. Incredulously they are amazingly accurate.

And isolating.

Disbelief and silence are powerful responses.

They must be vanquished.

10

What happened to you was not pretty.

It was not your fault.

I believe you.

You did not deserve to be treated in that belittling way.

You did not deserve to be hurt that way.

Come out in the daylight now,
find your footing without looking over your shoulder,
holding your breath,
or putting your head down.

I believe you.

11

Let us create a weaving of friends, from country to country,
until ribbons of friendship wind round the
globe linking woman to woman, person
to person, beyond borders of wealth or
poverty, nationality, ethnicity, color of skin.
Form a netting to hold and protect,
to assist and listen, to believe and to love without qualification.

I cannot promise that you will trust your judgment, ever again,
but you can learn to laugh, and be held when you
make a mistake, any mistake, over anything.

12

I love you. I am sorry that bad stuff happened to you.

Have a cup of tea, speak or be silent.

Weep. Sleep. Accept a blanket of affection.

Tell the story if you want, take your next steps.

You are welcome here, whenever you want, whenever you need,
whether you feel weak, or sad, or scared.

You are welcomed here and loved.



13

It is not measured or weighed whether you get over this, or never.
Some do. Some don't. There are no medals awarded, or withheld.

I love you. I am sorry that bad stuff happened to you.
It is not your fault. You are not responsible for the violence,
the threats, the coercion that came to you, directly and indirectly.

Whether you believe this or not it is true.

14

Yes, you may limp in your heart, forever.
That is not terrible. That does not mean you cannot love again,
or be loved.

You may cry out in your sleep or panic in the noon day sun
from a memory suddenly appeared.

This does not matter.

This does not make you less worthy a person.

I love you. I am sorry those hurtful degrading things
happened to you. It is not your fault. I love you. I believe you.

15

Come, enter this house of soothing,
love and compassion.
Accept what you can of your story, and
worry not about what you cannot absorb.

Let your deep self rest here, for an hour, a day,
a week without judgment, without probing.

There are no stairs here to be climbed,
no agendas to be satisfied,

The misbehaviors of another are not your fault.
They are not your responsibility to fix.

I love you. I am so sorry that bad stuff happened to you.
There are no right ways to go on, no wrong ways either.
Be here. Know that you are welcomed.

16

You do not have to 'get over' what happened.
There is no obligation to forget.

There are thousands, maybe millions of stories, told, untold.
Join in creating an equally vast weaving of acceptance and love.
Wherever you see the sign of ribbons, outstretched hands offering
a cup of tea, know there is another saying,

“I am so sorry this hurtful stuff came upon you.
Cross the threshold, take my hand, drink the tea.
Tell your story, or not.
You are seen. I love you,
I am truly sorry for what happened to you.”



17

Maybe you will never be completely free of all the bits and pieces of shock lodged in your body and soul. Maybe there will remain remnants of fear and sadness, confusion or anger.

In this vast weaving of friendship a cup of tea, a friend, are ready to respect your stammering, eyes that look away, or breath that catches in your throat. You can begin to heal the sorrow, and in little segments, put down the burden you have carried.

18

I say to you without qualification,
it is not okay what happened to you
It is not your fault.

I am sorry terror and threat were present
in your house of love and devotion.
I am sorry words of admonition, kicks under the table,
cars driven dangerously, silences imposed, arms twisted,
happened alongside public facades of affection, smiles, laughs.

Whatever the specific ways of controlling
and dominating occurred it is not your fault.

19

I am sad that you could not tell the story sooner,
if you knew it. I am sad you could not leave sooner,
if you have left. I am sad if you have found no way to leave,
or stay away.

That does not stop me from saying, from feeling

I believe you. I love you.
I am so sorry this difficult controlling behavior
has been and continues to be present in your life.

I applaud your bravery.

20

Whatever enormous effort or catastrophic episode helped
you to leave, that was a courageous act.

If you could not ever leave I offer you
the same love and affection.

Fear, terror, and threat are mighty
forces against which to strive. Come. Have a cup of tea.
Accept the hand of friendship. Rest.
Sleep if you can. I am sorry you have
lived through such unbelievably destructive times.
It is not your fault. I love you.



21

I have no expectation of you. I hold out no standard or
measure of your present or
future happiness, your present
or future success. If you are gone from that situation
dominated by violence or its
threat– there is the mark of your freedom.
If you are still there I am sorry for your continuing
pain and thwarted life.

Wherever you are, however you feel,
join in weaving a highway,
marked by the sign of the ribbons,
a cup of tea and friendship, around the world.

22

Ubiquitous is a big word, that
means everywhere, omnipresent, in all places.

Imagine, that everywhere, in all places,
abuse and violence, physical, mental and emotional harm,
is done to women.

This legacy, past and present, is not okay.
It has never been okay, even while it continues to occur.
And yet, somewhere, everywhere,
abuse to women is happening now.

23

What a strange phenomenon of the human psyche is this insidious,
ubiquitous, thing of abuse that affects thousands,
maybe millions of women, everywhere, in all places.

In its wake comes silence, and more, silence.
Deafening, shattering quiet.

To stop this behavior of abuse requires the actions of women,
their friends and families. Together.

24

It is time to speak, and to make more, and more, places of love
where no matter how great or small the wounds,
women can come and be free, from threat, fear, and violence.

Come out, for good, for a little while,
for however much you can manage.
Join in weaving ribbons of friendship in and out of all the places
where women are caught in situations of oppression
and destruction. Join in weaving a pattern of compassion,
and comfort, of believing and loving, around the globe.
Until every piece of earth is touched and every woman,
anywhere, can reach out and know, if only for a moment.
I love you. I believe you.



25

Lurking below silence, shame hides under the covers,
wrapping transparent layers of gauze that hide nothing.

Shame keeps silence in place. Ubiquitous, in all places,
shame covers the repugnant,
pestilent scars from the bad behaviors in abuse,
violent and non-violent.

Simple isn't it, to say, the behavior of abuse is bad behavior,
not good, not nice, not earned, warranted or deserved.
Simple but truthful.

26

Shame, disgrace and disparagement are repercussions of abuse,
invisible disfigurements that afflict and neutralize the voices
and actions of dissent against the every where activities of abuse.

No. You did not deserve mean treatment, subtle torment,
bruises – inside or out. I believe you and I support your resistance
to the perpetuation of abusive behavior against any woman.

27

I believe you. I love you. Take my hand;
come with me into the open. Speak.
Join your hand to that of another.
Make a sign of the ribbon over your door and upon your heart.

I am sorry this terrible thing nibbled away at your
self-respect, is now causing you to pretend, hide,
be brave and stoic. Enough of that.
I love you. I have always loved you.

28

Nothing that was done to you prevents me from
ceaselessly loving you or will keep me from declaring your
essential worth as a beautiful human being,

I am so sorry that your
shiningness was dulled,
your glory and pride in the beauty
of your self was ridiculed
and chipped away. I believe you.
I celebrate your vibrancy, your genius,
the wonderment of your being.

29

Do not shrink from my love.
Whether you have left the place of your abuse
or not, there has to be an end to the
self-castigation of your beingness.



30

Let my love melt away the scar of disgrace,
dissolve anger and make vanish the thin
lines of pain. Once inflicted by another,
now continued by yourself,
expose the scars to sun and light that the
self-censorship of disgrace be lifted.

I love you. I believe you.
You did not deserve those dastardly
behaviors or punishments.
I am sorry you live or have lived in that anguish.
It is not your fault.

31

Join, one by one, town by town,
village by village, around the world.
To stop, to say, “No” to all abuse against women.

These behaviors are not acceptable, are not a viable way to
conduct life in human civilizations. Anywhere. Everywhere.

32

I love you. I believe you. Let me wash away the film of shame
covering your soul, and your body, your voice and your actions.

Take my hand. Be comforted. Go out.
Find a human being, someone you will recognize by
the sign of the ribbons, a hand reached out,
the light coverlet of friendship offered.
Offer the same to another.

33

You may hear “Always. It has always been thus.”
You might even hear actions of abuse approved or defended.
No. Incorrect. Mistaken. Do not believe any longer
that any form of abuse upon women is acceptable.”
Anywhere. Everywhere.

I love you. I believe you. Believe each other.
Share friendship and open hearts.
Put the sign of the ribbons over your doors.

34

”It has always been thus.” is the speech of cowardice,
of those who are lazy and fear.
“It has always been thus” are words to avoid the truth,
scoff at the reality and be blind to the harmful effects
of abuse made against women.

Be compassionate towards those who fear and would do nothing
to create change. From them also I do not withhold my love.



35

Condoning violence to women must come to an end.
Adding harm by isolation must come to an end.
Acquiescing through silence and avoidance must come to an end.
Join me, join each other, I love you. I believe you.

36

Be not afraid of the woman hurt,
shy not away from her pain and confusion.
Make a sign of the ribbons to fly on the winds,
to touch down on the thresholds
and into the hands of friendship.
In every place where women are harmed.

May acts of affliction be gone from your life,
or if they are not, I repeat. I love you. I believe you.
Take courage. Find the sign of the ribbons.
Enter. Rest. Even for a moment.

~Kate Ransohoff, 2006~

Sign of the Ribbons



is one quiltbook of



Sign of the Ribbons

- Honors women for the totality of their experience – for beauty, tears, abuse and strength
- Gives witness to the words that are not safe for women to speak; to truths hidden in silence; to the power of art and beauty to awaken, and mend
- Provides a pathway for those who have no direct experience of abuse to support and be a friend to those who have
- Offers healing words to those who have been directly affected by abuse

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To inquire about a Sign of the Ribbons exhibition, workshop or reading, contact Kate Ransohoff at krquilt@gmail.com or Karen Rowe at ksrowe@mindspring.com