

A Sermon on Trauma Triggers

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for May 28th, 2023 (and beyond)

I manage my traumatic stress primarily with art and humor. I understand why some who live with traumatic stress respond to it with regression in a feeble attempt to live in a state of mind where the trauma never happened resulting in denial, delusion, and arguably exacerbating the problem. They desperately wish to simply be comforted by keeping themselves in a state of regression that is familiar and feels relatively safe. And, sometimes loved ones just want their baby back and the baby complies when rewarded with comfort and safety. I never regressed and that's not how I manage nor mitigate my traumatic stress. The loved ones feel accomplished by seeing the traumatized child as they once were before being victimized. And, this perpetuates immaturity for many traumatized people. The credit for my ability to manage my trauma as well as I do goes largely to my PapaSam (maternal grandfather) and the court recommended child psychologist who helped me before, during, and after the trial of one who raped me when I was 6 years old. PapaSam never knew what happened to me. He was still working full-time when it happened. My maternal grandmother and mother told me if he knew he would kill the rapist and go to prison where I'd never see him again. So, they took me through the process without him ever knowing anything beyond some need to run errands during the day while he was at work. One night I had night terrors after it happened and ran out to the living room at PapaSam's house screaming about a monster in my room. He got his gun and ran back there with me ready to shoot whomever might be present. I knew then that my maternal grandmother and mother were probably right. I believe that's why my uncles never knew either. PapaSam and all my uncles served in various branches of the US Military, primarily the Navy and the Marines.

I was raped at a house that was one house away from my maternal grandparents' house. My mother lived near her parents for the support because she was abused by my father, they divorced, and she was in her early 20s trying to navigate independence and single parenthood with her own traumas too. By one house away I mean when facing my grandparents' house from the street, there was a house directly to the right where nothing traumatic ever happened to me and then a house directly to the right of that where I was raped. The rapist took a plea deal because I was so young and everyone agreed it was better not to put me through the trauma of testifying at trial so sought a plea deal. He spent less than 2 years incarcerated. I was 8 years old when he was released and he returned to live at that house. The house alone was a trauma trigger and I saw it every day, often more than once a day. I didn't enter it ever again, but I saw it every day. I saw him on occasion too, but never interacted with him again. Seeing him was also a trauma trigger and a bigger one than the house but the house was a big one too. When I was a teenager I lived with my maternal grandmother for a couple of years because my mother married another abusive man after living with him for a while who sexually and physically abused me too as well as physically abusing my dog. But, I lived with her in that house and walked to school every day passing the house where I was raped when I was 6 years old. Sometimes I'd see the man who raped me outside with a child around the age I was when he raped me. I wanted to scream or grab the child and call the police. But, that would be crazy because surely he was rehabilitated and I didn't witness the

child being harmed, just in what I considered harm's way. And, that's one reason I think I'd be better off if the death penalty attached to that crime and he was sentenced to death when I was still a child. Even if he wasn't put to death and just secured on death row awaiting it for my entire childhood, I'd have been able to leave the trauma in the past where it most likely belongs.

In my teens, my mother's live-in boyfriend later husband briefly, did abuse me too. I did report it to social services. A social worker came to the house and interviewed me. She said she could put me in foster care and to call her if I choose that. There was a girl in my class who was in foster care. I asked her about it and told her my situation. She told me she'd been raped and sexually exploited at every placement. She said when she reports it, they move her to a new placement. I thought the devil I knew would be better than a devil randomizer so did not call social services to proceed with placement. I looked at my options as I understood them and attempted suicide. This led to voluntary psychiatric care briefly and then Provo Canyon School for a safe place to focus on education away from all the threats. But, Provo Canyon School was a reform school with adjudicated youth and run like a prison. It was very abusive and I never felt safe nor comfortable there either. My mother and grandmother rescued me from Provo Canyon School and I chose to live my maternal grandmother at the house right by where I was raped until my mother separated from the new live-in abuser, which she later divorced. Once he was gone, I moved back in with my mother because I hated being reminded every day of the rape. But, she still lived in the home she shared with her abuser at that time. Later we moved into an apartment that had no trauma triggers except we had to call the police on our neighbor who beat his wife and toddler shaking the walls of my mother's bedroom, my room didn't have anyone else on the other side of the walls. That man threatened my mother with an axe if she reported him again. But, they also quieted down for a while and he was later arrested while I was at work. I'm not sure if he killed his wife or child, I just know he was gone and someone more sociable moved into that apartment.

There's much more to the story and other traumas as well. I developed breasts earlier than my peers and had a mature form by 6th grade making me a target for normal boy interests and bullying/ridicule from what my grandmother called jealous mean girls. I had no control over it and just wished to be left alone or to at least feel safe more often than not with some peace of mind. But, I graduated Highline Community College as an honor student and made the Dean's List for Scholastic Excellence before graduating with a BA from the University of Washington. And, I did that in spite of my mother believing a former co-worker with whom she'd had sex for over 20 years, that was seemingly very generous with her as a result of that, was setting her up with her own house in the late 1990s right after I moved into my own apartment and before I returned to school. My PapaSam told her to have me move back home and return to school, which I successfully completed as stated. (My maternal grandmother and PapaSam got divorced when I was 13 or so and he moved out of state right before my mother got involved with the other abuser.) I did live with my mother in that house and that man was a disgusting human being who never had a written agreement with my mother regarding the house. His daughter ultimately evicted my mother after my mother had already invested double the

value of the house and land in it. There was no contract and I told her it had to be in writing if dealing with real property. She said she felt foolish trusting his word. So, the eviction happened in 2012/2013 and I sold my car to buy the house we live in now. She said she'd replace the car swiftly, but still no replacement 10 years later and most employers won't hire someone without their own vehicle. I rely on public transportation and walk to job interviews and such when I find a job available I can do that accepts my current situation in terms of transportation.

Now, where people don't know the above and think my sense of humor and/or art (including literature) is weird or off-putting at times, sometimes I just want to rattle off the above so they understand I'm doing my best and they'd likely have killed themselves by now if in my shoes or be a total drug addict living on the street triggered all the time by new threats and traumatic experiences with no hope of any real comfort and joy. You ask any mental health professional about my personality after telling them my full history and they will let you know I am doing great. That's real perspective. Shikata Ga Nai!

For those interested in starting #TaoFu Self-Defense Exercises, please see <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> and begin at any time.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.