

A Child Called It

By Dave Pelzer

DAVID: (Pg 15) [Once upon a time] My family was the Brady Bunch of the 1960's. My two brothers and I were blessed with the perfect parents. Our every whim was fulfilled with love and care.

My mother, Catherine, was a woman who glowed with love for her children. **(Pg 16)** One day, she took us to Chinatown in San Francisco. As we drove around the area, Mom told us about the culture and history of the Chinese people. When we returned, she decorated the dining room with Chinese lanterns, she dressed in a kimono and served what seemed to us as a very exotic meal. At the end of dinner Mom gave us fortune cookies and read the captions for us. I felt that the cookie's message would lead me to my destiny -- "Love and honor thy mother, for she is the fruit that gives thou life."

(Pg 18) [And Christmas!] Before dawn, Mom would creep into our room and wake us, whispering, "Santa came!"

INTRODUCTION

From the outside looking in, you might've believed the Dave Pelzer had the perfect life – but four teachers who happened to be paying attention in the 1970s realized that was not the case at all. On paper, the Pelzer home seemed picture-perfect. But there were secrets at home. You see, when Dave's mother drank, she morphed into something quite horrific. And unfortunately for Dave, he became her primary target. But in the 1970s, Child Protective Services did not exist, and our society didn't want to know that there were parents out there actually hurting their children.

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DAVID: (Pg 21-22) [As I got older] My relationship with Mom drastically changed. As a small child, I probably had a voice that carried farther than others. I also had the unfortunate luck of getting caught at mischief, even though my brothers and I were often committing the same "crime." In the beginning, I was put in a corner of our bedroom. When she yelled at us, her voice

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changed from nurturing mother to the wicked witch. Soon, the sound of Mother's voice began to send tremors down my spine.

When Mother decided that the "corner treatment" was no longer effective, I graduated to the "mirror treatment." Mother would grab me and smash my head against the mirror, smearing my tear-streaked face on the slick, reflective glass. Then she would order me to say over and over again, "I'm a bad boy! I'm a bad boy! I'm a bad boy!"

(Pg 27-28) When I came home from school one day Mother told me that she had often driven to school to watch my brothers and me play during our lunch period recess. Mother claimed that she had seen me that very day playing on the grass, which was absolutely forbidden by her rules. I quickly answered that I never played on the grass. I knew Mother had somehow made a mistake. My reward for observing Mother's rules and telling the truth was a hard punch in the face.

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Mother then reached over and turned on the gas burners to the kitchen stove. She sneered at me,

MOTHER: You've made my life a living hell! Now it's time I showed you what hell is like.

DAVID: Gripping my arm, Mother held it in the orange-blue flame. As hard as I fought, I could not force Mother to let go of my arm. Finally, I fell to the floor, on my hands and knees, and tried to blow cool air on my arm.

Mother ordered me to climb up onto the stove and lie on the flames so she could watch me burn. I refused, crying and pleading. I had to buy time.

(Pg 29) Finally, I heard the front door fly open. It was my brother Ron. My heart surged with relief. For a moment in time, Mother froze. I seized that instant to race to the garage. I had beaten her. That day I vowed to myself that I would never again give [her] the satisfaction of hearing me beg her to stop.

(Pg 30-31) The summer after the burn incident, school became my only hope of escape. By then, Mother

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would “forget” to feed me. On a good day, I was allowed leftover cereal portions from my brothers, but only if I performed chores before going to school. I started stealing food at school. (Pg 39-40) My idea was to rip off frozen lunches from the school cafeteria. Alone in the restroom, I swallowed frozen hot dogs and tater tots so fast I almost choked myself in the process. I returned to the classroom, feeling proud I had fed myself. **I had fed myself!**

That afternoon, Mother changed my mind. She dragged me into the bathroom and slugged me in the stomach so hard that I bent over. She rammed her finger into my mouth as if she wanted to pull my stomach up through my throat. I knew what was going to happen next. I closed my eyes as chunks of red meat spilled into the toilet. “I thought so. Your father’s going to hear about this!” Mother ordered me to scoop the partially digested food out of the toilet and put it in a bowl. Mother was gathering evidence. (Pg 41) That evening Mother and Father stormed into the kitchen.

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MOTHER: So, you think the boy is through stealing food, do you?

DAVID: I could tell he was getting more and more tired of the constant “What the boy had done now” routine. Staring at me, Father shook his head in disapproval and stammered,

FATHER: Well, if you would just let The Boy have something to eat.

MOTHER: EAT? You want the boy to eat? Well, the boy is going to EAT! He can eat this!

DAVID: I sat on a chair and picked the clumps of hot dogs out of the bowl with my hand. Globes of thick saliva slipped through my fingers, as I dropped it in my mouth. As I tried to swallow, I began to whimper. I turned to Father. He nodded for me to continue. I felt a hand clamp on the back of my neck.

MOTHER: Chew it! Eat it all!

DAVID: (Pg 42) Father turned away to avoid my pain. And at that moment, I hated Mother to no end, but I hated Father even more. He stood like a statue while his son ate something even a dog wouldn’t touch.

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(Pg 50-54) The summer of 1971 – my morale dwindled. Food was little more than a fantasy. I rarely received breakfast and never lunch. As for dinner, I averaged about one every three days. During dinner, I sat at the bottom of the stairs listening to the sounds of “the family” eating. Suddenly [I heard] Mother’s snarling voice.

MOTHER: Get up here!

DAVID: I had begun clearing the dishes from the dining room table, praying that tonight I would get something, anything, to soothe my hunger.

MOTHER: You have 20 minutes! One minute, one second more, and you go hungry again! Is that understood?”
Look at me when I’m talking to you!

DAVID: As I looked at her, Mother snatched a carving knife from the countertop and . . .

MOTHER: If you don’t finish on time, I’m going to kill you!

DAVID: Her words had no effect on me. She had said the same thing over and over again for almost a week now. But something looked wrong. Very wrong! I strained my eyes to focus on Mother. Her whole body began to

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weave back and forth. I thought she was going to fall. I imagined that the old drunk was going to fall flat on her face. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a blurred object fly from her hand. A sharp pain erupted from just above my stomach. I tried to remain standing, but my legs gave out, and my world turned black.

It took my Mother nearly half an hour to dress my wound. There was no remorse in her eyes. I thought that, at the very least, she would try to comfort me. Looking at me with no emotion, Mother stood up, washed her hands and told me I now had 30 minutes to finish the dishes.

From the kitchen I could hear Father flipping through his newspaper. I made my way into the living room. Sitting on the far end of the couch was my hero. I knew he would take care of Mother and drive me to the hospital. “Mo . . . Mo . . . Mother stabbed me. She told me if I didn’t do the dishes on time . . she’d kill me.”

FATHER: (*Long pause - coldly*) Well . . . you better go back in there and do the dishes. Damn it boy, we don't need to do anything that might make her more upset! I don't need that tonight . . . Go!

DAVID: I stood before Father in total shock. He didn't even look at me.

(Pg 95-97) (*As an adult*) As a child living in a dark world, I feared for my life and thought I was alone. As an adult, I know now that I was not alone. There were thousands of other abused children. Some victims stay quietly locked in their shells. They look the other way, believing that by not acknowledging their past it will go away. This is my story. And I believe if society is to come to grips with the problem of child abuse, it must be exposed. Childhood should be carefree, playing in the sun; not living a nightmare in the darkness of the soul.

SOURCE INFORMATION

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AWARD HISTORY

2003 National Qualifier
2006 National Qualifier
2008 National Qualifier
2009 National Qualifier
2010 National Qualifier
2011 National Qualifier
2022 National Qualifier - MS
AR State Qualifier
KS State Qualifier
MN State Qualifier
ND State Qualifier