

The following is excerpt from Resolve to Rise by Lilli Correll.

I was born in a small town in western Massachusetts. I was the second of two girls and ended up being my mom's favored child, which was no great prize. As she would later tell me, I was "her savior." Over time, I came to believe I was a savior to my whole family. It was my job to calm my mother so no one got hurt. To make matters worse, my father's focus was on my sister, leaving me without anyone who truly saw me.

I wasn't always successful at "my job." Sometimes, no amount of smiling or cutting up with my mom could calm her, and she erupted like a volcano — explosively and with little warning. The violence in our home was so severe that my father was the first man in the state of Massachusetts to win custody of his children. Later, I learned my mother had to have threatened to kill me or my sister to lose primary custody in our state. In our case, she did so in front of a police officer.

As I grew up, I thought I could handle anything that came my way. I was also my own biggest critic. My internal dialogue was often filled with lines like "You need to stop talking" or "You are too sensitive." These were not words of compassion but of criticism. I was constantly measuring myself against others. It was a never-ending battle; I was either better or less than everyone, never just in community with others. My whole life was a competition to feel okay and be enough.

My mom's and dad's words often echoed in my head along with my own internalized negativity, which I rehearsed again and again. I knew I was only increasing my suffering, but whatever I tried, the thoughts just kept coming and tormenting me. Eventually, I began to replay old behaviors in new relationships, taking responsibility for others' happiness. I felt either immense shame or anger when letting others down. It seemed everything was about my adequacy or inadequacy.

Abuse has many negative impacts. It gives the abuser the false impression they are superior, while the abused feels inferior. It often leaves the abused individual with a deep seeded sense of shame — the feeling that they must have done something wrong. If the abused individual does gain the courage

to speak out about the abuses they suffered, they are often accused of “playing the victim.” In reality, they *were* victimized and are now bravely speaking the truth.

The brain also undergoes significant changes following trauma, especially repeated trauma. A person who has experienced such abuse and trauma often becomes paralyzed or debilitated, carrying a great weight of shame. In turn, they may be more comfortable developing relationships with others who have experienced significant trauma and have difficulty navigating relationships or with others who could retraumatize them.

I live a life resolved to rise. Life still kicks my ass from time to time. I still make ill-advised decisions that take me off course now and again. But through it all, I keep picking myself up, dusting myself off, and figuring out what will be the healthiest path forward. Because I refuse to let my challenges define me as a person, I continue forward.

My intention is not to indict my mother or call her out for being a bad parent. I know she suffered her own trauma, and her parents likely did as well. She had her own journey. I can only reflect on what I experienced, how I was impacted, and what I needed to keep going. My intention is to create a path forward for those who want to heal.

I invite you to be bold and courageous in your journey of healing. Trauma can leave you feeling like you are damaged beyond repair and destined to live a life of dysfunction and pain, so more than anything, **I want to inspire you with hope!**

Surviving trauma is hard, but it can get better. Rising is not only about dreaming dreams — it’s about living out your dreams for a better future. Abuse or trauma may have taken power from you. You may feel you are the problem or that nothing can be done to make life better. I’m here to offer a different story.

I decided to start writing in a journal when I was eight years old in hopes of improving my perspective and navigating life with greater ease. In my first entry, I wrote down everything I liked about my best friend so I could go back to it whenever I felt angry with her. I used to joke that my journal was

my first solution-focused counseling intervention, and the intervention was on myself. I would focus on the positive, and the positive would expand. I received my master's degree in family psychology and went on to obtain my clinical licensure. I spent nineteen years counseling individuals, couples, and families while I was climbing the ladder in corporate America. I have spent my career with a focus on equipping organizations and individuals for success, always highlighting the importance of showing regard, kitting others for success, being accountable, and holding others accountable. More than anything, I've always wanted to make the world a better place.

My professional and personal hope has been to embrace my journey, learn from the missteps and successes, and advance my goals. Both work and life have given me opportunities to look at myself, learn, and grow. That growth has empowered me with tools to help others advance their hopes and dreams.

As civil rights activist Diane Nash said, "Freedom, by definition, is people realizing that they are their own leaders." You cannot remain a victim forever. Eventually, if not all at once, a restlessness will grow in you to rise up. You then get to choose what you do with that energy. Sometimes you might live in reaction to what occurred, becoming angry and resentful. This response is understandable but will not ultimately produce any benefit. When anger takes up residence in you, there is no room for healing.

The fact that you are reading this lets me know you want to claim the person you were born to be. With this in mind, I salute you for leaning into your journey and having the boldness and bravery to look your suffering in the face and say, "I recognize you and all your impacts, but I am not a victim anymore. I am wonderfully made and full of possibilities — possibilities that I choose to realize and claim."

As Jackie Chan said, "Life will knock us down, but we can choose whether or not to stand back up."