

A story of hope, redemption and rebirth

“Shattered Silence: The Untold Story of a Serial Killer’s Daughter” by Melissa G. Moore with M. Bridget Cook (Sweetwater Books, 2009, \$16.99)

WE HAVE ALL read news stories and books about serial killers and their victims, but I’ve often wondered about the other victims — the families of these murderers. The people who have loved and lived with cold-blooded killers, the shame and humiliation, the notoriety and stigma, the confusion and anger: What is their story?

“Shattered Silence” answers that question in the case of Melissa Jespersen, daughter of Keith Jespersen, who murdered and raped eight women in a killing spree that started in 1990, when Melissa was 10 years old. Melissa’s true story of living and loving her father tells of her love and admiration for her tall, handsome dad as a child, but also the uneasy feeling that all was not right with him.

As Melissa recounts growing up in Washington state and stories of her truck-driver father’s temper, infidelity and cruelty to animals, it is clear she both loves and fears this man. In her young mind, she can’t understand the “Jekyll and Hyde” who is her father. The man who kills and mutilates her kittens as he laughs, and the one who protects and loves her. From a very young age she learned to stuff it down — never talk about the bizarre events. Just act like it didn’t happen and don’t expect any help from her passive, beat-down mother.

It’s hard to follow a timeline of events, but in short, the parents argue and the children are uprooted from the only home they have ever known: “Scenes flashed before my eyes — some mirrored those flashing by outside the car window ... others were invisible to anyone except



Regional Reads

By Charlene Hirschi

me. ‘Didn’t want us anymore ... Spokane ... my grandmother ... place of our own.’” The family quickly descends into poverty and ends up in the dark, gloomy basement of their grandmother’s small home in Spokane.

“Everything at Grandma’s seemed so temporary, since we only had the few items of clothing Mom had packed for us, plus our one special item. Even the makeshift beds in the basement seemed to indicate to us that of course this couldn’t be permanent.”

When her father arrives a few days later, Melissa “ran down the street, deliriously happy to see his face and his open arms, until I noticed the trailer. It was packed full of our belongings, and not one item in it belonged to Dad.”

Her mother struggles to support the family and her father is in and out of their lives. He didn’t come often, but when he did show up unannounced, he took the children out for a whirlwind weekend that included fun activities and shopping. The author recounts one of the early visits where he took them to the mall and lavished them with clothes and

Meet Melissa Moore!

Author Melissa G. Moore will be signing copies of her new book, “Shattered Silence: The Untold Story of a Serial Killer’s Daughter,” at the following locations this weekend:

Friday, Oct. 2:

- 10 to 11:30 a.m. — Murray Costco
- 1 to 2:30 p.m. — Orem Costco
- 3 to 4:30 p.m. — Sandy Costco
- 6 to 9 p.m. — Sandy Barnes & Noble

Saturday, Oct. 3:

- 9 to 11 a.m. — Bountiful Costco
- 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. — Sugarhouse Barnes & Noble
- 2 to 3:30 p.m. — Murray Barnes & Noble
- 4 to 5 p.m. — Gateway Barnes & Noble
- 6:30 to 9 p.m. — Orem Barnes & Noble



gifts, joking and laughing. But his mood changed in an instant, when he stopped at an ATM to replenish his cash. “All of a sudden the energy around my father shifted. His body froze, and I saw him grow instantly angry. He looked at us with the coldest look I had ever seen in my life. ‘W—What’s the matter, Dad?’ I asked, trying to still the tremor in my voice. ‘Did something happen?’ There was a long pause. ‘Did something happen?’ he asked, his voice menacing. ‘You happened! I’m nothing but a paycheck to you kids. You know when I come, I have money, so I pick up you kids, and you suck me completely dry!’ His voice had risen sharply, and he didn’t seem to care that everyone nearby was watching, their eyes as wide as ours. ‘You’re a bunch of ungrateful, selfish kids!’”

Melissa’s life is like an out-of-control rollercoaster and she comes to dread her father’s visits, yet longs for their family to be back together. Especially after her mother again marries an abusive man and their home life becomes something to escape from as often as possible. Although Melissa knows there is something amiss with her father — he often drops broad hints and lays some pretty heavy, adult information on Melissa’s young shoulders

— the entire family is shocked when they find out he is in jail for murdering not one, but eight, women, the last being his fiancée and only one the children had met.

Years later, Melissa discovers that her father had written a letter to family members. On March 24, 1995, Keith Jespersen wrote the following to his brother: “It seems my luck has run out ... I got myself into a bad situation and got caught up in a bad emotion. I killed a woman in my truck during an argument ... I am sorry that I turned out this way. I have been a killer for five years and have killed eight women. Assaulted more. I guess I haven’t learned anything.”

The author writes, “Before I heard the news from my mother that late spring night, I had believed that my father would remove me from my dysfunctional mess at home. What was there left to hold on to? I was angry that he had abandoned us, but even angrier that he would think that it was acceptable to rape and murder people. It was too close on the heels of my own rape, and I was furious with him, though I kept my feelings deep inside, not voicing them to anyone. Who was my father? I thought I knew the man, but it was evident to me that my father was a total stranger.”

“Shattered Silence” has drawn

the attention of Oprah, and after Melissa appeared on her show a few weeks ago, her book became an instant bestseller. This is a story of deprivation, hopelessness and a young girl’s anguish. It is also a story of hope, redemption and rebirth. At the end of the book, Melissa offers advice for “anyone who may be struggling, no matter how big or small the problems you face.” From her perspective, she reaches out to others with advice she didn’t have and tries to help “now that I am on the other side of the horror and tragedy.” This courageous young woman has triumphed over despair and tragedy and has found peace in her newfound faith and life with her husband and children.

I enjoyed this book not because her father was notorious or her situation salacious, but because she opened her heart and soul to show us that our life’s hard knocks do not have to be the end of hope, but just the beginning.

Book critic Charlene Hirschi holds her master’s in English from Utah State University. She is among a number of freelance writers whose columns appear in The Herald Journal as part of an effort to expose readers to a variety of community voices. Authors, readers and editors are invited to visit www.charlenehirschi.com.