

I cannot recall in recent memory a more hard-hitting and poignant story of how a woman struggled to overcome such adversity in her life and emerged as an author to tell about it—I could not put **BREAKAWAY** down once I started to read.

**Jack Roberts, Cable Radio Network**

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Nadia's story of perseverance, hope, and faith can serve as an inspiration to anyone. Nadia's book takes us on a journey through culture, religion, and gender and shows us first hand the hush-hush treatment of girls in various societies. Perhaps more than anything, Nadia provides hope to victims of domestic violence who are still on the inside, looking out. Nadia's story shows us all that there is a place of hope and love beyond those walls.

**Sifu Jeff Larson, founder of Chi for Health**

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Child abuse is a huge problem in the world, stretching from the USA to India to the Middle East. Nadia Sahari's book shows one woman's journey out of torment and torture to a new life as an author and actress. She pursued her dreams and they came true for her.

**Rick Anthony, *Hollywood Film Flash***

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**BREAKAWAY** opened my eyes to the many obstacles one has to face in an abusive relationship. It has been an honor to have Nadia work on our V-day event knowing all that she has overcome. It is important that men and women educate themselves and take responsibility for bringing awareness to abusive situations. This book is a must read for bringing that awareness.

**Emiliano Styles, co-founder of Soulploitation/Acting Up!**

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I have not read a book like **BREAKAWAY** in a very long time. From the smell of cigar smoke that symbolizes how her abuse began to repeated abuse for many years, it takes readers through her nightmare. This book is for anyone who has been abused, but it is also for any human being that wants to feel inspired. If you like to read, get this book. If you don't read, you'll be grabbed if you pick this one up.

**Connie E. Curry, author of *Give Me Back My Glory***

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This story is an incredible true account of the human being's incredible ability to continue and flourish in the face of hopelessness and despair. This book is beautifully written and is impossible to put down. Sahari's story is not an easy one to tell, but she does it with grace and an undying hopefulness that has been such an inspiration to me in my life since finishing this book. The message that this book puts across is an important one! It is a must-read!

**Autumn J. Clark, NYC**

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I agree with everybody who says that you cannot put this book down until you finish it. I love this story and the hope it gives to all of us.

**Valentina Graham, talent agent, Hollywood, CA**

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**BREAKAWAY** by Nadia Sahari is a memoir that delivers for those who love real life stories. Nadia means "Hope," and **BREAKAWAY** is about how Nadia survived a lifetime of multiple abuses and abusers. Nadia said, "No more abuse" and meant it. Nadia is an engaging writer. At the end of the book is a list of resources.

As a former child abuse investigator, what I know for certain is that everyone needs awareness of the reality of child abuse or we will never stop it. This is a book worth reading. Thank you, Nadia, for sharing your life and hope in **BREAKAWAY**.

**Nadine Laman, author of *High Tide***

This is a truly amazing memoir of a wonderful woman. To know that any one human being could withstand so many dramatic and terrifying situations, tragedies that no one human being can possibly fathom, made my heart go out to her. Her deep connection to her faith pulled her through the darkest of times. I recommend this book to anyone who's ever been through any kind of abuse. It will change your outlook on life!

**Allison Elizabeth, Austin, TX**

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Nadia shares her life story with us not only as a personal catharsis, but also as a beacon of hope for abused peoples everywhere. Nadia demonstrates the power we all have to redefine our lives and ourselves. Reading **BREAKAWAY**, I am once again encouraged to dare to dream and forgive.

**Lara Nixon, Austin, TX**

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I loved reading **BREAKAWAY** because it taught me how strong someone can be, and also to never give up hope. By sharing her story with the world, Nadia Sahari has made her life story one that will inspire others. I admire her for being willing to do this. I think that everyone should read this book.

**Paige Lovitt for Reader Views**

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Great book! The fact that Nadia has overcome everything she went through is an inspiration for all. Some people would have given up on life, but Nadia just keeps moving forward with hers. Her positive attitude should be a lesson for all women that have gone through abusive relationships. You CAN break away and begin again. Thank you for this truly beautiful book!

**Alicia Schowe, San Antonio, TX**

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I read this book in one night, it is well written but also gives those experiencing abuse hope and a pathway to escape their current situation. Nadia teaches how to forgive and move forward with your life. This is a must read!

**Ebony Black, Houston, TX**

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Few people have gone through all the trials and tribulations that Ms. Sahari did and come out on the other side to tell their story. The author is thankfully writing from a place of great healing, having managed to change her life completely despite these hardships. I look forward to seeing Ms. Sahari's indomitable spirit portrayed in a movie version of this book some day, as well as more writing from this author.

**Agnes Eva, Austin, TX**

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This is an extremely poignant book dealing with issues many women must overcome. I commend Nadia for coming out with her story so that other women can find hope and encouragement, and that they too, can survive abuse.

**Irene Watson, Author of *The Sitting Swing***

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Every once in a while comes a story that I believe has the power to change history. My prayer for this book is that it may bring the change that is necessary in the world to stop abuse and domestic violence. Bravo, Nadia!!!!!!

**Christa Jan Ryan, author of *Silent Screams from the Hamptons***

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*Breakaway*



*Nadia at Age Five*

# *Breakaway*

*How I Survived Abuse*



*Nadia Sahari*

Pink Butterfly Press  San Antonio, Texas

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*To all the innocent victims of domestic violence and  
sexual abuse everywhere*





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## *Breakaway*



## *Prologue*

**I**T IS IMPOSSIBLE TO SPEAK OR WRITE OPENLY about abuse without offending someone, especially when the abuser is a member of one's own family. This is particularly true in my culture where family honor is so highly regarded, and it is true whether the abuser is dead or alive. No one wants it to be known that a father or grandfather was anything but a good person.

I respect these feelings. I have had them myself. It is inevitable. At the same time, because abuse is so rampant in our world, I have decided to speak out, hoping that my family, all of whom I dearly love, will understand why I write. I truly believe that my story will inspire many victims of abuse to take heart and take control of their lives, to make whatever move they deem necessary for their own well-being.

I have done the best I can to avoid causing offense by changing the names of all the characters in this book. Only my immediate family will recognize the individuals I am writing about in most cases. Others who find themselves in these pages can hide behind their fictitious names if they are so inclined.

I have had wonderful support from many people during the writing of this book. They applaud my success. They commend me for making choices that changed my circumstances. They are

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happy to see that I am eager to help others who are in abusive relationships. What wonderful, positive people they are! I sincerely thank them all for their encouragement. There are too many to mention by name. They know who they are.

The experiences I share in this book are all true. For many years, I felt alone with my history of abuse and held my silence. I thought I was the only one who had experienced the traumatic abuses I describe here. Gradually and cautiously, in small groups and in speaking engagements, I began to share some of my experiences with other women. To my surprise, I found that many of them had been victims of sexual or physical assault as well. They often said, “Nadia, you went through so much. My life hasn’t been anything like yours, and yet I’ve struggled to cope. You’re such an inspiration to me! You should write a book. I’ll bet they make it into a movie.”

It has not been easy to take their advice. It has been challenging and sometimes devastating to revisit and relive the pain and suffering of my past, to resurrect scenes of violence, to recapture deeply hidden emotions and to put them into words. The journey took me through many dark valleys of depression during which I could not be productive. That is why it has taken almost twenty-five years to produce this book.

Now is the right time. It is right because more attention must be paid to domestic violence and sexual abuse in America. We can no longer be silent witnesses to the daily oppression of innocent victims whose lives are devastated by abuse. We have just elected a new president, but neither major party made domestic violence or sexual abuse a theme of their campaigns. The media are virtually silent on this important issue as well. Therefore, I appeal to America in general to wake up, stand up, and speak up against abuse.

On the other hand, abuse happens to individuals regardless of gender, typically in private settings and without witnesses. The perpetrator may be male or female. It is so personal that it often does not have a voice. Victims of abuse frequently are too ashamed or too fearful to seek help. I write on behalf of all victims of abuse

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who need encouragement to seek protection and support. It is my sincere desire that my life story will bring you hope and courage to overcome your fears and find freedom from abuse. You can and you must before it is too late. Be strong, be right, dream big, and be free. Live the life you have imagined!



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## *Acknowledgments*

**A**S AN ACTRESS, I FULLY UNDERSTAND THE significance of credits, so it is a pleasure for me to express my gratitude to those who have helped me with this book. All my life I have loved reading, writing, and especially spelling. I gratefully acknowledge all the teachers who encouraged me in school. I loved school, not just because I was free from abuse there, but also for the sheer privilege of learning.

My children know that I have also enjoyed taking pictures, just as I enjoy being in front of the camera. They have endured my obsession at family gatherings for years. I promised them that I would not put their pictures in this book, but it has been a hard promise to keep. They are so handsome, and I appreciate them so much that I always want to show them off. Thanks to them for listening to me talk about my life throughout the years and sharing those years with me. I love them with all my heart.

My thanks go to Fabrizio for his superb work in the photography studio. He did the shots for the front and back covers.

Finally, I thank my husband for his love and support. He wrote the poems *Horizons* and *A Worm and Her Majesty* as well as selected verses from another poem entitled *Trees* that tie the chapters of the book together. He also helped me proofread the manuscript.



Breakaway



## Horizons

*There is a land where dreams come true,  
Where aspirations old and new  
Are realized by but a few  
Who dare to make the move.*

*Like Israel on the Moab plains,  
This move is not without its pains,  
But the land of promise still remains  
To those who make the move.*

*The obstacles are great and tall  
Like giants standing one and all,  
But no ill fate will e'er befall  
The one who makes the move.*

*The voices from the other side,  
Where souls victorious now abide,  
Cry "Blessings great and multiplied  
For those who make the move."*

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*It is an act of solemn will  
That drives the weary pilgrim till  
She sees the hope beyond the hill  
For those who make the move.*

*A pioneer in faith, she makes  
One step and then another takes  
And soon behind her all forsakes  
And dares to make the move.*

*The land before her now is flung.  
Its milk and honey song is sung.  
A life anew is now begun  
For one who made the move.*





*Part One*



*Stolen  
Childhood*



## Breakaway



*We are as trees, the sky apart,  
From tender roots we take our start  
And struggle through uncultured soil  
Toward unknown destination.*

## Grandfather's Room

**I** WAS A GREGARIOUS FIVE-YEAR-OLD. AT SCHOOL I was a real challenge to my teachers. I just could not stay in my seat. I liked to visit all the other children, one by one, like a politician. I am still like that. I love people and enjoy making new friends. My mother is like that, too. As the saying goes, "The apple does not fall far from the tree."

My socializing eventually forced the hand of my kindergarten teacher. She had no choice. She taped me to my seat! That stopped my travels, but I was still able to talk, so she taped my mouth shut! But it was all for nothing. As soon as she cut me loose, I went right back to having fun with my classmates. I did not have a care in the world at school. How I loved the classroom!

Grandfather's room was a whole different thing. For a long time, what happened in that room kept me from living the life I had imagined.

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I can still smell the stench of his cigar. It was on his breath and his clothes when I went to his room at the Dix Hotel. I was sent there at least once a week, starting at the age of five.

I had to take dinner to him. It was customary to do that in our Lebanese culture. If he did not come over for dinner, then it was my parents' responsibility to take it to him. Grandfather had lots of money. He carried a roll of one-hundred-dollar bills about three inches thick in his hip pocket. He did not need our food. He was retired from the Ford Motor Company, and his pension was more than what he needed to live on. Taking food to him once a week was a way for my parents to avoid feeling shame and guilt. It also meant they would avoid a harsh lecture from my grandfather about honoring parents. Catering to him was done for a lot of reasons, including, I am sure, to make him feel cared for.

Dearborn, Michigan, had a small Lebanese community when I was a child. It is much larger now, but, no matter how large the community, the family unit is most important in the Lebanese culture. Like all Arabs, regardless of their nationality, Lebanese Arabs are proud and always concerned about what people say or think about them. They are a very generous and hospitable people. However, they will not be shamed or dishonored by anyone, especially a son or a daughter. Grandfather knew this tradition well. If my parents neglected to send him dinner, he did not hesitate to chastise them for it.

Grandfather lived at the Dix Hotel in one room with just a bed, a dresser, an armoire, and a sink. To get to his room, I had to walk from our house on Ferney Street in Dearborn. The Tuxedo Hotel was at the corner of Tuxedo Street and Ferney, three lots from my house. I would turn right there, walk a block to Wyoming, a very busy street, cross it, turn left, and go one block to Dix Avenue.

The Cunningham Drug Store was at the corner of Dix Avenue and Wyoming Street. A Lebanese restaurant where my grandfather had most of his meals stood next to it on Dix. The dime store was beyond that. There was an entrance to the hotel between the restaurant and the dime store. Past the dime store and

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a cleaners was a coffee house where men gathered to play backgammon and Basra (a favorite card game among Lebanese) while smoking cigars and the traditional hookah or water pipe. Women were never seen there. Grandfather went there often.

The Dix Hotel was above these establishments. The hotel was a brown brick structure—a tired, old, and dingy building. In addition to daily rentals, the management offered apartments as well as studios like my grandfather's. However, unlike studios today, there was no kitchen. Grandfather used a hotplate to make coffee when he did not feel like going to the coffee house.

The main entrance to the Dix Hotel was on Wyoming Street. Double doors opened to the lobby. From the lobby, I had to climb one flight of stairs to a landing, make the turn to climb another flight to a narrow hallway, turn left, and walk almost to the end of the building before coming to Grandfather's room. It was a long way.

There was a back alley entrance, too, and sometimes Grandfather asked me to take that. I did not understand why. The alley entrance scared me to death. Years later, I learned that it was mostly used as a private entryway for hookers and others who did not want to be seen entering the hotel. I never liked to go there.

I usually went to the Dix Avenue entrance, so I could be outside as long as possible. I did not like being inside the hotel. The door at the Dix Avenue entrance was big and heavy. The top half was glass. I had to set Grandfather's plate on the sidewalk in order to open the door with both hands. I would hold it open with my back to the door, bending down to pick up the plate of food before going in. Sometimes, before I could get in all the way, the door would close quickly and push me in.

Once inside, I faced a steep, concrete staircase. There were at least twenty steps to the second floor, maybe more. I never counted. I was always afraid of climbing those stairs. I would hold on to the handrail as tightly as I could. It seemed I had my life in one hand and my grandfather's dinner in the other. At the top of the stairs was a door to enter the hallway. Through the doorway and to the left, it was a fairly short walk to my grandfather's door.

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Grandfather's room was small, dusty, and colorless. His bed was right in front of the door. It was a double bed with a metal headboard and footboard. He glued pennies on both the headboard and footboard with chewing gum. The bed was covered with a faded, worn blanket and two feather pillows. One of the pillows had a big depression in it about the size of his head. The mattress sagged in the middle from too many years of use. A large photograph of President Franklin D. Roosevelt hung above the headboard. Grandfather was a devoted democrat. He was a big fan of FDR.

To the left, pushed into the corner of the far wall, was a large, walnut-stained, wood dresser with porcelain knobs. A square mirror framed in wood sat on the dresser, its top leaning against the wall. A row of pennies affixed with more gum decorated the entire frame. My grandmother's picture was on the dresser. There were other pictures, too—snapshots of Grandfather's lady friends as well as my uncles, cousins, and other family members. Each picture frame had its share of pennies.

Beside the dresser, situated at the foot of the bed just a step away, was an armoire that served as a closet. Grandfather loved clothes. He was a meticulous dresser. His public image was very important to him. He liked to socialize and was well known in the community. He wore suits every day with coordinating hats and shoes. If he chose a black pinstripe suit, he wore black shoes and a light gray hat with a black band to match the pinstripes.

Grandfather kept an old, worn suitcase in the armoire. The suitcase was beige with a black strap in the middle. It was the size of a trumpet case. It held a deep secret in the form of a machete. Grandfather kept the machete, because the blood of someone he dearly loved was still on it.

A small, round, pedestal sink was posted in the corner beside the armoire. Grandfather's shaving mug and brush sat on the sink and next to them a straight razor. A white medicine cabinet with a mirror hung on the wall above the sink. The bathroom was outside in the hallway. All the tenants on the second floor shared the toilet and bath. I never saw that room.

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Opposite the door to Grandfather's room, beyond the bed, were three large windows. There were no curtains on the windows and no blinds. Grandfather had privacy because he was on the second floor. There were no other buildings across the alley, no people, and no traffic of any kind. No one could see what was going on inside the room. Besides, the windows were dirty and the sills were high, higher than my head. The radiator was under the windows. In the winter, I could hear it hissing and feel the hot, heavy air in the room. It was so hot I could barely breathe. Grandfather's room had no air conditioning.

Grandfather lived there alone. Despite being sociable, he did not have much company, except for the prostitutes that came to his room. He paid them five dollars for services rendered. Everyone in the Lebanese community knew about his business with the prostitutes. Not that Grandfather tried to hide his conduct. Nor was he criticized for it; people thought that a man of his age who was still having sex was a stud. He was respected by everyone, especially men.

Grandfather was not a big man. He was about five feet ten and very slender. His hair was salt and pepper, mostly pepper, and his eyes were dark brown, small, and squinty. His brows were black and bushy and shaped like a bird in flight.

Grandfather was a Shia Muslim, but he did not practice his religion. He would pray once in a while but he never changed the lifestyle that he loved. He was devoted to gambling and sex.

Whenever I took a meal to him, the routine was the same. I tapped lightly on his door. Grandfather was waiting for me. My mother always called him to tell him that I was on my way with his dinner and to watch for me. When he opened the door, I handed him the plate wrapped in aluminum foil, and before I could turn around to go, he would take my hand, pull me into the room, and lock the door. He always said, "Don't you want to spend a little time with your Jiddo?"

Then he picked me up and placed me on his bed. I clenched my fists. My body became rigid. My mind went numb. I closed my eyes and held my breath. Grandfather raised my dress up to my

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neck. He pulled off my panties, all the while kissing my neck and blowing hot, stinking air into my ears. He continued kissing me all over, placing his disgusting, cigar-tasting tongue in my mouth and ears. I hated him. I was terrified of him. I hated what he was doing to me. I wanted to run away and never come back, but there was no escape. I wanted to scream but could not. I had no voice. I wished I could fly away, far, far away, even beyond the sky. But I had no wings. I cried and screamed inside, but only inside. There was no outside anymore: "Let me go! Let me go! Please, Jiddo. Please, let me go. Don't hurt me. I want to go home. Please stop, Jiddo." Nobody heard me. There was no one to hear. My voice was silent as it would be for many, many years to come, silent but for the echo in my mind.

I lost all sense of feeling as Grandfather was having his way; there was nothing I could do. First, he rubbed his penis on my private parts. Then he rubbed it on my feet and legs and all over my body. Then back to my privates. Then, just before he ejaculated, he would run to the little porcelain sink and let all the sperm go right there so as not to get any on me or my dress. He always made sure that there were no signs of what he had done.

Before he let me go home, he would take the suitcase from the top shelf of the armoire and remove the machete.

"Do you see these blood stains?" He waved the blade in my face. "If you ever tell anyone about what Jiddo does, your blood will be on this, too. I'll chop you up and put you in this suitcase. No one will ever find you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Jiddo, please let me go," I sobbed, trembling all over.

Then Jiddo put the machete back into the suitcase. He would show it to me again from time to time. I can still see the blood stains.

After it was all over, Grandfather would give me some small coins or a fifty-cent piece. I was nothing to him, just an object for his perverted desires.

I was absolutely afraid of the machete. It was enough to silence me. I fully believed Grandfather would kill me. I feared that I would never see my family again. I had good reason. As an

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adult, I heard stories that my grandfather had killed his wife with that same machete. He was insanely jealous over her. My grandparents rented a room to a gentleman. Grandmother was never unfaithful, but when Grandfather discovered that she innocently had gone to a movie with the boarder, he reportedly spied on them at the theatre, followed them home, killed and dismembered both of them with the machete, and burned their parts in the basement furnace. Whether the story is true or not, I do not know. I was told that my grandmother and her friend disappeared, never to be seen again.

I was made to go to Grandfather's room until the age of seven. After that, one of my siblings or one of my cousins was sent, and I was kept busy with other chores around the house. I am not aware that my grandfather molested my sisters. If he did, they have kept their silence. Perhaps they repressed their experiences as I did mine. After many years, I learned that Grandfather did to one of my cousins exactly what he did to me. Molesters will always find a victim.

I eventually left my grandfather's room, but it never left me. I carried it with me in silence most of my life. I still carry it, but not in silence now. In some ways, talking about it has set me free, but it always hurts to know that someone you trusted was the cause of your pain. It is especially true when you are an innocent child and the offender is an adult, worse still a member of your own family. Trust lost in childhood is difficult to regain. My grandfather has been dead for a long time, but the scars he left remain with me. I say scars because in many ways I am healed. The abuse I suffered is no longer an open wound. Exposing Jiddo's deeds now is not easy for me, but I find some strength and freedom in the telling.

Even now, in writing this chapter, my whole body aches, and I feel like I am chained to Grandfather's bed. I have a shooting pain going down my arms and legs. I am gripped again by the need to fly away. I am short of breath. I feel like I am suffocating. I am drained. Exhausted. I smell the cigar once more. The memories are hard to face, but I must move on.

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How does one heal from sexual molestation? Healing begins with forgiveness and ends with reconciliation. In order to give myself the freedom to heal and to go forward in my life, I have had to forgive my grandfather for what he did to me. Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to confront him; he died before I became aware of his acts. My grandfather never acknowledged his evil deeds to anyone, and he never confessed to me or asked for forgiveness. I wish he had. I might have been able to reach the reconciliation stage of healing, and my later years might have been less traumatic.

I have found that healing from sexual molestation is like peeling an onion. The pain is removed layer by layer it seems, and when you think you have removed the last layer, another appears. The layers seem to emerge from deep within the subconscious mind. I just deal with them as they surface. I do not know if the pain ever goes away never to return again.

The inner child of the past lives on. She still needs a lot of nurturing. I embrace her. I talk sweetly to her. I take her by the hand, and we go on together. I have no doubt that the molested little girl within me will well up with emotion again one day when I remember Grandfather's room, but I also know that we will rise above those feelings. We have done it many times before. We will fulfill our dreams.

I find that healing takes place when I turn my eyes away from my grandfather, away from being a victim, away from what he did to me, to what I want to be. As long as I allow my mind to dwell on his room, I still live in bondage to my thoughts. When I break away, I find that I am able to take risks. I am able to make changes. I can move on. Only then can I fly toward my dreams.

Having experienced flying, I know that I can never be ruled by Grandfather's room again. I know that healing, like flying, is a process rather than a single event. It is in fact a metamorphosis. It is like being transformed from a caterpillar in a cocoon to a butterfly. It is easy to step on a worm. It is difficult to catch a butterfly.

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Finally, I realize that not all flights are smooth. Turbulence and clouds will come. If you cannot see where you are going, you must rise above the clouds. I know this for certain: when you are flying, it does not matter where you have been. It only matters where you are going. Your dreams are your destination. There is freedom in flying toward your dreams.