

A story of resurrection

“Trauma creates change you don’t choose. Healing is about creating change you do choose.”
— Michelle Rosenthal

A features column in an arts and lifestyle rag usually doesn’t go down the rabbit hole of a person’s trauma and her battles scraping to get out of darkness.

A few artists I’ve interviewed for Deep Dive unleashed catharsis into their personal journeys, including personal Hells; however, after reading my drafts, two declined to “expose” so much of their lives for public consumption.

“Out of sight, out of mind” is not a great place in order to heal, though, and a person like Kiera Morgan faces those demons head on. She embraces the good, bad and ugly of her totality.

The Oregon Coast has remarkable

narratives of people who face down homelessness, incarceration, depression, poverty, illness — what some call the school of hard knocks to the tenth power. Trudging out of the dark into the bright burning light serves up powerful survivors’ tale.

Kiera Morgan fits this to a tee. I met her last year at Depoe Bay’s Neighbors for Kids while I was giving a presentation on an anti-poverty program I am heading up in Lincoln County.

Her nose for news quickly motivated Kiera to get me on camera for her weekly show, “Coffee with Kiera.” This is a newish Lincoln County digital platform of her own creation: Pacific Northwest News and Entertainment.

A few months later, here I am talking to her on phone, my first interview conducted with the impersonal tools of social distancing.

I ask Kiera several times — “Are you okay with the dirty laundry aired and published in a newspaper?”

“I am not ashamed of where I came from. I think my story could be a learning lesson for others.”

ACES — the deck is stacked

Her story is one of reclamation — radio DJ-ing, theater and a newshound background. She has been out here since 1994. Setting down coastal roots entailed pain, struggle and personal discord. Keira is

now at her sweet spot — a good marriage to Tony Thomas (with Rogue Brewery for 12 years) and her own involvement in civic and community programs.

She has been on (or is currently a member of) such diverse advisory boards as the Salvation Army, Retired Seniors Volunteer Program, Partnership Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse and Central Coast Child Development Center.

Sort of the “why” of Kiera’s involvement in these social services non-profits weaves back to her early years as well as her adulthood: she was born in Idaho 55 years ago; moved to Bend; ended up in Gresham by the age of five. She’s spent time in Portland, Pendleton, Sweet Home and, finally, the Central Oregon Coast.

Though she’s not “just” defined as a child of early divorce, Kiera recalls a stepdad who was an abusive alcoholic. She ended up emotionally and physically battered.

We bring up ACES — Adverse Childhood Experiences. I’ve worked in education, with gang prevention programs, newly released prisoners and foster teens. Training around ACES, I was galvanized to in understanding my students’ and clients’ childhood traumas. Those negative events early on have concrete outcomes — future violence victimization and perpetration, lifelong physical and mental health issues, substance abuse, homelessness and plethora of lost opportunities as adults.

The adage, “it takes a village to raise a child,” is pivotal in how society should create neighborhoods, communities and situations where children can thrive. Letting children fall through the cracks and live in abusive, impoverished homes nullifies many possibilities of a thriving adulthood.

Kiera emphasizes how our communities pay for this as fellow citizens get involved in substance abuse, are challenged with illiteracy and fall into myriad unhealthy lifestyle “choices.” As a community, we pay in many ways for these people failing through the cracks:

Poverty, violent parents, substance abuse in the household and being a foster youth are all high-influencing ACES.

Kiera ticks off all of the above. Her biological father was out of the picture, she says, not because that was his choice. Her mother was not emotionally sound to break away from an abusive husband, her step-father.

She moved in briefly with her biological father who was a chef and baker in Rhododendron at an operation centered around rental cabins.



SIMPLY DESIGN STUDIOS

“I would go to the restaurant for meals,” she says, emphasizing how she rode her bike to friends’ homes, and was able to hang with farm animals at her friends’ parents’ farms.

“My dad was good-natured, a very positive person. He would literally give the shirt off his back to anyone in need. He was a happy man, and everyone called him, Hap.”

Getting back up

Keira’s time with her biological father ended when a private detective, hired by Keira’s mother, stated he saw Hap letting his young daughter hang out by herself in their cabin while her father was just around the corner working in the restaurant.

More ACES: whipped by her step-father, and bruises on her body. “I literally had the design of his belt on me because he hit me so hard.”

Her biological father would show up to his sister’s house. They called the police once, and the step-father told the officer the marks were evidence of normal disciplining. Nothing happened to the abuser.

The young Keira witnessed her stepfather’s heavy drinking. She had the marks of being swatted and belted, and she held in the emotional pain. The vicious cycle of a mother allowing the abuse of the child by a male step-parent put Keira front and

center into his rage. She was grabbed by the throat, her hair pulled and head slammed against the wall.

The next day the sixth grader showed a teacher the fingerprint bruises on her neck and welt on the back of the head.

“Is this proof enough, or do I have to die before you believe me?” Kiera pushed through.

This journey has more twists and turns in Part Two published on the OCT website, but as one bookend to her life, Kiera reiterates that “I want to be like my dad — loving and a smile on my face. It’s important for me to expand my web site. It puts me at peace knowing I can help others through the news site.”

PTSD may stand for post traumatic stress disorder, but the label could mean Personally Tough Strong Dame after spending time with Kiera Morgan.

•••

Read on as Deep Dive continues at www.oregoncoasttoday.com.

Paul Haeder is a writer living and working in Lincoln County. He has two books coming out, one a short story collection, “Wide Open Eyes: Surfacing from Vietnam,” and a non-fiction book, “No More Messing Around: The Good, Bad and Ugly of America’s Education System.”

