

INTERVIEW WITH BOSS KEY MEDIA



BKM: Why did you decide to write “HELPLESSNESS”?

Around 2013 I was being emotionally drawn to the possibility of writing a book about my family's story and about what happened to my sisters, but primarily about what happened to us brothers after we learned what happened to them. What always stopped me was my fear of my sisters reaction. That put me off for years. My brothers and I were so afraid to speak to our sisters about what had happened for decades.

BKM: Was there a specific event that triggered you to act?

2013, I was heavy into Direct Selling and Network Marketing. I was creating a media company, and I was looking to write a book on how to attract the youth and urban markets into Network Marketing.

There was an event put on by the motivational speaker, Lisa Nichols, down in San Diego called "How to Speak and Write to Make Millions." While there, I went to a session called "How to Write a Book In 20 Minutes." The facilitator called on different people to answer their questions about process and structure. I put my hand up, and even though my hand had been up the entire time and the facilitator kept looking right at me as if she was going to call on me, she would turn away and call on someone else. It was frustrating.

One time she pointed at me, and I began to speak. She said, "No. Not you. I'm pointing at the lady directly behind you." She did that a few times. She kept being passed over me. As I was sitting there, waiting my turn, I'm thinking about writing this book on Network Marketing, but the whole time, the thing that kept coming to the forefront of my mind was something else entirely. The facilitator, after everyone had shared their idea, finally called on me. I began to talk about the Network Marketing book, but that's not what came out. I think my frustration at being overlooked and that pull to share my family's story caused something else to come out of my mouth. What came out was the description of the book "HELPLESSNESS."

BKM: Tell us about the Motown contract.

In 1977, right when all this was exposed to my brothers and me, we were negotiating to opt-out of our contract with A&M records because Motown had come to us. They wanted us to come to sign with them. They had put together this package which, at the time, was the largest recording contract they had offered to any new group.

At the time, they had the Four Tops on their roster, The Jackson Five, and Diana Ross and the Supremes. And here they were coming to our family, The Whitney Family. We were very popular in LA. We had done a lot of traveling around the world, TV shows, magazines, etc.

On this particular day, we were called to a family meeting. I thought it was to discuss when the Motown signing date was going to be. My three brothers thought the same thing. Well, that's not what the meeting was about.

BKM: What was it like growing up in Portland, OR?

It was fun and terrible. My father was married before he met my mom. He had three kids from a previous marriage. My father left his wife for my sixteen-year-old mother. We've got a ton of half-brothers and half-sisters. About twenty. All my grandparents lived there. I've got aunts, uncles, and a ton of cousins. They're just all there, so there was never a lack of fun. So, Portland, on one hand, has spectacular memories. But on the other hand, it's where I first saw my father beating my mother. Sometimes, almost near death.

In 1969 my mom had had enough. She packed all eight of us into my aunt's purple car and just drove down to Los Angeles without telling my dad.

BKM: Who are you writing this book for?

From my experience, as a brother, we are left out of the conversation when our sisters have been sexually abused, even if the abuse takes place in the home. Sisters don't want to hear anything from their brothers because they think we aren't impacted. Certainly, we aren't impacted to the degree that they are, but the impact on brothers can be absolutely devastating.

When I was writing the book, it occurred to me that there aren't any books out there about brothers talking about their experiences. There are books about men's experiences being molested or raped, but none from a brother's perspective of what it's like once he learns his sisters have been molested or raped. And so, as I was writing the book – in the 6+ years it took to write it – I spoke to a number of men whose sisters had been molested. A lot of them came to me once they found out what I was writing. They started telling me their stories.

BKM: What other platforms do you speak on?

I did a 16-part series podcast called "Behind the Book: This Is for The Brothers." I spoke with a number of people in the podcast, some radio people, in particular Gene Braunstein. I spoke with a good friend of mine, George Kennedy. I spoke to Dr. Yvonne Merrill, who was a Doctor of Literature at the University of Arizona for about 40 years; she read the manuscript and said it was one of the most powerful things that has ever crossed her desk.

I spoke to my son about what it was like for him once I told him what happened in my family growing up and the impact that information had on him. He and I had a very intense interview, which is an episode in my podcast, "Behind the Book: This Is for The Brothers." He asked me questions that no one had ever asked.

I also did an interview with my wife on what it was like to watch her husband going through all of the emotional challenges I was going through while writing the book over seven years. I became closed off and didn't want to talk about any of it. She is actually the one who brought my victimhood to my attention. It was she who pointed out that I was a victim. For forty-five years, I didn't look at myself as a victim. She looked at me one night while we were in bed and said, "You're a victim." I told her, "No way." She responded by saying, "How can you not be a victim? How can you not see that?" I imagine most men and brothers are going to say, "I'm not a victim. It was just my sisters." Well, brothers are victims. Whether we know it or not when one person in the family has been sexually abused, the entire family has been victimized.

In another episode of the podcast series, I had a discussion with my son and my older brother. My older brother handles the trauma and shame vastly different than I do.

The most important episodes in the podcast are the 2-hour 4-part episode at the end. They are episodes thirteen through sixteen, with my older brother and third sister. For my older brother, it was the first time he spoke talk with one of our sisters about her years of being molested by our stepfather and with our mother's knowledge. It was my second time. She got to ask us all the questions she had been holding on to for years about what we did and didn't do. It was our chance to tell her what it had been like for us. It was four hours of tears, surprise, disappointment, understanding, and love.

I am currently working on the website to support the book. All this and more are on my website.

BKM: Are there any revelations that you had in the process of writing this book?

Too many. And they continue to come. The first, major revelation was that for maybe 45-50 years I thought that HP had only "gotten" to my two oldest sisters and that my two youngest sisters were never in his crosshairs – or that at least he hadn't gotten to them.

One day, I'm writing this paragraph to close out a chapter. I re-read the closing part when it hit me. I was told about it prior to writing this paragraph. I even wrote about it, but the whole time it never sunk in that he got to the twins. I was so blindsided that he had gotten to them. I was devastated.

You see, I thought that I had protected them because of the confrontation that he and I had at the top of the stairs in 1986. It hit me so hard that I just started spiraling down. I was emotionally going downhill, or what I call falling into Alice's rabbit hole, because at that moment, it occurred to me, that he beat me. He got to them. And it is just, it was

just... I started to go to such a dark place. Luckily for me, just out of coincidence, my second oldest sister called, and she was able to pull me back out. That's one of the big ones. Another revelation was my son; I didn't know how it had impacted him until we did the podcast. No idea.

When talking with my son, he asked why I never gave up looking for Henry. Before he asked that, I never had an answer. But, when he asked me, the answer came to me as clear a day. I thought it was to recapture my self-esteem and give my sisters a degree of closure, knowing all pain could never go away. Those are important, but when my son asked me that question, I realized the true answer. I wanted to be the man who wouldn't let it go. The one who didn't fail them. So many men and women in our family failed them, including me. But even though I failed them, that didn't mean I could finish the job for them. I didn't want to be like those other men. What I really wanted was for my four sisters to be proud of me.

BKM: Other than the people in the podcast, who did you talk to while writing “HELPLESSNESS”?

After hearing what we heard, we instantly became fragmented as a family. No one wanted to talk to anybody, especially brothers and sisters. It was so bad. We were all in trauma. PTSD was setting in fast. We're all in our heads trying to figure out what to do next. Our singing career was gone, too. A couple of my sisters, they just bounced. They were gone. A couple of them stayed back because they were too young.

I recognized, rather quickly, that if I'm going through this, everyone else is going through the same thing. If I'm going through this as a brother, hell, my three other brothers are going through the same thing.

Incidentally, my older half-brother in Portland knew about this stuff but didn't say anything. He's in the book in a very prominent way. The trauma and suffering of carrying the burden of that knowledge about his eight little brothers and sisters for 50 years, and not saying anything. Man! Fortunately, he was willing to tell me what he had seen happening to his little sister. All his pain came pouring out when we talked because he was looking for a way out of his suffering. All nine of us were all looking for a way out. There were a number of aunts and uncles and grandparents who knew, but they just turned their backs on us. They knew it but decided to do nothing. Their betrayal...wow!

Speaking of revelations, I spoke to both of my grandmothers about it, about what they knew and their reasons for doing nothing. For not helping their grandchildren escape Henry. Especially their granddaughters. My father's mother said she hadn't seen us for 20 years and she was afraid that if she said something, she would never see us again. I couldn't believe it when I heard her say that. I told her, "I get that, except, because you didn't step up and help us, you purposely put grandchildren in harm's way on a daily basis – for years. Your granddaughters were repeatedly sexually abused because you did nothing. You put your needs over the needs of your grandchildren."

My mother's mother, she told me she knew but decided not to say something because she felt it was not her place. She, like my other grandmother, decided to put her grandchildren in harm's way on purpose. Her justification for not protecting us is old-school BS. "It's not my business. I'm not going to get into another family's business." I told her, "We are your family, and every second of every day that you chose not to do something about it, you allowed your granddaughters to be raped. Because it was about you and not about your grandchildren. That's what my mother did. And that is the major problem. It's never about the children. It's about you. It's about how it'd impact the "Whitney reputation" in Portland, in your church. You're just like mom. Like mother like daughter. Reputation over your grandkids."

BKM: Tell us about book two, "HOPEFULNESS".

"HOPEFULNESS," which I've begun writing, is about once you are at that helpless place...you're pulled into the abyss or drop down the rabbit hole...it continues down and down until you say stop...and it doesn't. The hardest part is you have to try to climb your way out emotionally. That is so hard because you are usually alone and scared. There is nothing to grab onto except the last bit of hope, and that's fading fast.

In order to cling to hope going forward, there have to be occasions and people that you can glom onto who can help pull you out. Who can give you a sense of hope when yours is dying? The "HOPEFULNESS" book is about that point I decided I was okay...that I was enough. You know? That I was all I needed after realizing that no one was coming to my rescue. It was going to be up to me to get myself out of this.

It's also about learning to find those individuals that I can hopefully depend on and call on. It's about those few people who can, hopefully, help me get out of this dark place.

BKM: What is "HAPPINESS"?

"HAPPINESS," the book, is something that I'm really looking forward to sitting down and writing because I already know who the people and situations are that make me happy. And I know their role in all of this.

BKM: Will your family continue to contribute to Book 2, "HOPEFULNESS," and Book 3, "HAPPINESS"?

With the "HOPEFULNESS" and "HAPPINESS" books, my siblings are also going to contribute sections as well. My three sisters, my older brother, and my older half-brother, are all going to be a part of it. So, as the reader, you are going to get this constant family's view on what happened and how it affected each of us. The beauty is we're not always going to be on the same page or have the same recollection, which I

think is great. We will have six different points of view on the same event. Many factors will contribute to the different views, such as age, social interaction with friends and family, gender will play a huge role, of course, maturity, position in the family, and responsibilities within the family.

Our timelines may be a little different, which is fine. Depending on who you are, what you were going through, your age, and all this stuff, you might remember things differently. Your individual experience will set you apart from all your sisters and brothers. Frankly, I think that is great. Look, at the end of the day, what you've got are these eight children in one nuclear family and a half-brother who have been so traumatized...who have been shattered. How do you put that back together in any meaningful way, if it's possible at all? Some of us have done an okay job, while others are still searching for hope and happiness. To me, the only question that matters is how do you, as a person, go from "HELPLESSNESS" to "HOPEFULNESS" to "HAPPINESS"? If you can answer that question, your family has a chance.

BKM: Do you have any words for people going through this now?

If you can find a place where you are happy with yourself, and you know who those people are who make you happy, who keep life happy, even in the midst of whatever is going on, you have a chance. But that shit ain't easy. However, if you can do that, you are empowered enough to go forward every day because you are hopeful. Otherwise, you're just going to fall back. If you go back too far, you'll never find a way out. Even if you are stagnant, you are falling behind emotionally.

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