

Unforgiven

Lisa L. Weber

I have always had this overwhelming need to be loved and accepted. Of course, there are psychological reasons for this, specific to my own life and experience. But, to be loved and accepted is a basic human need. We all want to feel like a special and important part of the larger family of humanity. Yet somehow, we spend so much time and energy finding ways to alienate one another. One by one, we stack bricks of judgment and hate and resentment, until we build a wall to keep out those who are different, or who don't look or think or act or love the way we do, or the way we think they should. We realize all too late those walls can become prison walls.

I grew up in a small, nondescript farming town in the Southern California desert. The population is about 25,000, give or take a few cows. This town was like most small towns, in that everyone knew everyone, and even if you weren't related, you were still treated like family. I myself was related to half the town. But as they say, familiarity can breed contempt.

I never felt like I belonged. I remember my mother had a book about the strange and paranormal in which I read an article about "star children." There was a set of questions one could answer to determine if one was actually from outer space. I answered yes to most of the questions, including, "Do you feel as though you don't belong," and "Do you feel as though you want to go home but you don't know where home is." Right then I was convinced I was from another galaxy. How I prayed for the day a flying saucer would appear in the sky above my house, pull me up via tractor beam, and whisk me off to my "real" home planet.

Yes, I was a dreamer from day one. My mind constantly wandered into faraway lands, and I was always wishing my body could follow. I was always wishing for an escape from reality.

My parents' divorce was a reality that was difficult for me to accept. Their love was broken by alcohol, anger, and infidelity, and the failure of their marriage forever colored my view of love and relationships. I don't resent them. They both dealt with emotional trauma in their lives, and I realize now they never felt like they belonged in that small town either. They had dreams that went abandoned and hearts that never completely healed. I tried desperately to gain their praise and attention. In some way, I wanted to be reassured of their love, to be reassured that they wouldn't abandon me as they had abandoned each other.

As I got older, my need for love and reassurance became a problem. I started having boyfriends younger than I should have; or, at least according to everyone's rules. Much like my parents, I became the subject of gossip. By the time I reached eighth grade, I had been labeled a slut. Girls would sneer at me and call out "bitch" when I walked by. I also got prank phone calls regularly. I didn't fight back the way I should have. I guess a part of me thought I deserved it.

It was about this time that I started listening to rock and heavy metal. This was music by, and for, those who were denied love and acceptance, and it became a soundtrack to the turbulence inside me. I soon discovered Metallica, and their song, "The Unforgiven."

Metallica
"The Unforgiven"
Metallica
08/1991
Elektra

When I heard it, I felt like James Hetfield was singing to me, about me. I felt like he had somehow snuck into my soul and yanked everything out.

*New blood joins this earth
And quickly he's subdued
Through constant pained disgrace
The young boy learns their rules
With time the child draws in
This whipping boy done wrong
Deprived of all his thoughts
The young man struggles on and on....*

I learned the rules. But I didn't, couldn't follow them.

In high school, finding acceptance was even more difficult. Girls hated me. They all thought I was trying to steal their boyfriends. They had no idea I was struggling with my sexual identity. Boys thought I was weird, or an easy target. I succumbed to the siren's song of more than one already-spoken-for smooth talker looking for some tongue swapping and heavy petting.

I also experienced racism for the first time when I dated a boy whose parents I couldn't meet because he wasn't allowed to date Mexicans. The irony is that some of the Mexicans labeled me a "coconut," because I didn't speak Spanish, dated gringos, and didn't "act like a Mexican," whatever that means.

*They dedicate their lives
to running all of his
He tries to please them all
This bitter man he is
Throughout his life the same
He's battled constantly
This fight he cannot win...*

All I wanted was to be a part of that family. I wanted, and tried, to please the people around me. But more often than not, I found a way to disappoint them. I wanted to be liked, to be loved, or at the very least, not be labeled, judged, and hated. But I was different. I thought too much, felt too much, wanted too much. I broke too many of society's rules. Sometimes I broke them on purpose, as a way to say "fuck you," and "I don't give a shit what you think." But I did give a shit. And after every transgression, I felt terrible. I had gone astray. I was lost, a sinner. I was unforgiven.

A part of me thought I would always be unforgiven. That I wasn't good enough, innocent enough, nice enough, or smart enough. That I would never be enough. Not for my mother, not for my father, not for my friends, not for anyone. Not even for this world. I became depressed and turned to alcohol and drugs. I had thoughts of suicide. And I cut myself. Darkness will accept anyone.

*What I've felt
What I've known
Never shined through in what I've shown
Never free
Never me*

So I dub thee unforgiven

I felt burdened by the weight of judgment and imprisoned by contempt. All I wanted was to be free. To be free from labels. To be free from the disapproving eyes and whispering mouths. To be free from the anger and pain. To be free to know acceptance, forgiveness, and love.

I left that town as soon as I could.

You labeled me

I'll label you

So I dub thee unforgiven

Over the years I continued to struggle. Not only with seeking love and acceptance from others, but also from myself. Throughout that time, "The Unforgiven" served as an anthem for my soul. It was the song of my struggles. The song of my sorrow and guilt and regret. The song that played while my conscience battled with itself. The song I played while I cried and screamed and fell to my knees and begged forgiveness. It was the song that roared in my head every time reality punched me in the face.

It was also the song that brought me comfort. The song that reminded me I wasn't alone in my pain. The song that told me we're all struggling to be the people we are meant to be. The people that can fit into the large, complex puzzle of humanity, without losing that which makes us different and special.

Somehow, I found my way out of the darkness. I found a way to accept all that I am and all that I'm not. I found a way to forgive myself. And I realize now that everyone in that small town had their own struggles. We were all fighting a battle to be loved and accepted. We were all fighting against subjugation in its many varied forms. We are all still fighting and will to continue to fight.

My heart still jumps when I hear "The Unforgiven." I still turn it up and sing along at full volume. Only now, it is more rallying cry than requiem. Now, I want others to hear it and know they are not alone. Now, I want it to serve as an anthem for all those fighting for love and acceptance. Now, I want to play it so loud, it brings down all those prison walls.