

Confessions are for the soul

by Connie Brisson

I think I was five-years-old. It was my first confession.

I went into a room in our old, simple country church and the priest asked me what my sins were. My sins? I wasn't sure what he was talking about. So I told him, truthfully... I didn't have any.

We sparred back and forth a few times about it and then he got mad me. "NO sins," he said? "Surely you have done something wrong." I got scared because he was getting increasingly angry, so I lied... I told him that I took a cookie from our cookie jar at home and he sighed, relieved that we were finally getting on with the process.

Yes, that's really what happened during my first confession. I knew the priest didn't know that I had just lied to him... I mean, our home didn't even have a cookie jar!

It was my first introduction to confession and I'm not going to lie, I thought confession was ridiculous. Why did I need a priest to hear my sins? But later on I realized that the Catholic religion has some traditions that are helpful, even if I didn't understand or appreciate them at the time.

We all sin, whatever that looks like for all of us. When I was young, it was about sneaking a candy but as I got older a sin was a burden of a much greater weight on my heart – it was something that I actually felt I had done wrong.

But the thing with the big sins is that you don't broadcast them, do you? No, they really are often jaded little secrets that we keep close to our hearts because we actually don't believe that anyone could ever love us once they learned them.

But here's the big thing that I've learned about "sins" or things we feel we've done wrong. If we do not confess them to someone (ideally, to someone we do trust), we often can't move ahead in life because, interestingly enough, we are unable to forgive ourselves.

There is something that mysteriously occurs (something healing from God or the Universe) when we confess our deepest weaknesses/sins to someone else that we really trust (and who are worthy of that trust). There is something in that humble admission that allows energy and life to move forward for everyone involved – because ultimately, we are all just here learning and growing, and making mistakes is part of that process.

I remember something I did in my teens (in ignorance, not planned) that afterwards, I was very ashamed about and it wasn't until my late 20's, when I finally told a trusted girlfriend about it, that its memory's power to shame me finally stopped. She confided that something similar had happened to her and she felt it was a life lesson that many of us go through.

There have been other times in my life when I have only found inner peace after I realized that I had to confess that I was sorry for what I had done wrong to the other person involved. Saying I was sorry was one of the hardest things I ever had to do, considering how hurt I was myself about the situation that happened, but

it was the only thing that gave me peace. Sometimes many people can be wrong in a situation, but it only takes one person to say they are sorry to transform the whole relationship.

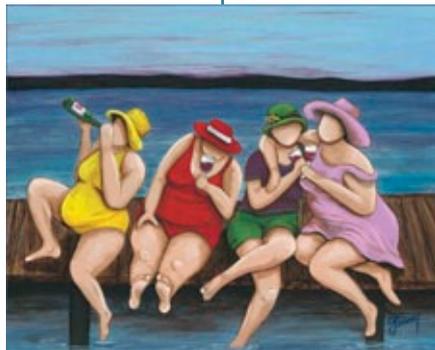
I was in a group a while ago (lead by the wonderful Carmen Jubinville) when we were discussing our pasts and I instantly began to drown in my own guilt/turmoil, remembering mistakes from my past. So I asked Carmen how I could make peace with myself over my mistakes.

Of course, that's a big question but she answered me with something so beautiful, so simple and I've never forgotten it. Carmen told me to remember/accept that there was a part of me that was "broken" at the time of my mistakes. My behavior had not come from my "wholeness" but from my "brokenness."

That made me instantly weepy because it was so true. The things I've done wrong, that I'm not proud of, I've certainly done them ALL from a place of great brokenness. And that knowledge has helped me to both forgive myself and also the others involved.

When I was at the University of Victoria, we had to read *The Stone Angel* by Canadian author, Margaret Laurence. In it, the heroine is not able to die (or find peace) until she has confessed her life's failures to a stranger she meets one night. That book has always stayed with me because we are all stone angels, all just trying to learn our lessons in a life that is not always easy or kind. And sometimes those lessons leave us cold and broken, like stone, unable to process our life's events.

I think it is our ability to share the things that have happened to us with someone who is trustworthy that alchemically transforms those difficult experiences from stone to gold – because ultimately we are all just here learning. All of our lives are a process of learning and alchemy...



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