

## Author's Commentary on "The Relic"

"The Relic" was originally published in Poder, a women's literary journal at Hunter College in 1988 (before the advent of DNA science). Many of the submissions to Poder came from the drawers and files of women returning to school as older students who were highly encouraged to tell their up-until-that-decade hidden stories. I was not then, nor am I now, a specialist in any field that gives me academic or other authority on any social or psychological issues of rape. My expertise is that I am a woman, writer, artist, and, as many of us out there, have, for years been concerned and have read, observed and sought answers to questions on this subject.

"The Relic" deals with issues of rape I feel are at the crux of the cause, including: (1) the socially perceived lack of physical pain or damage (when that is the case) making it "all right"; (2) the lack of understanding what the body means (or should mean) to every living person—and consequently how the body, when abused by others (physical attack, abuse, rape, starvation, or other atrocity) represents the worst crimes of humankind—the issue that these crimes against the body are still seen as insignificant (and I won't here get into why human beings belittle the worst crimes and persecute the least); (3) the crucial requirement of trust of a partner after an attack, rather than the world-wide customary of rejection and accusation of the victim; (4) the need for each victim of attack to have some method, some cathartic acts that bring her back to full self love and respect.

"The Relic" is not based on any person or persons or real events. I know not one woman, or man, like any of these in this story. It is a work of fiction I wrote because I wanted to present rape in a way that could clarify certain issues I've mentioned. If I had interviewed or written about a specific person, these issues might not have been in the forefront of the story, because each victim doesn't always experience these issues in a way that a story could expose. For instance, I don't know any woman at all who was attacked years ago. Consequently, I couldn't find one to tell me they are now over this past, and are now happy. And, this last is a huge part of my point. These events can be overcome if the issues are understood by all (in this case, Julian understands) and worked through with support. It is my belief that rape can become a thing of the past if the society and each person, likewise, understands the issues.

You will notice in this story, the attacker is a stranger. I understand these are the least common forms of sexual assault. However, making the attacker a stranger gives me the opportunity in a few short pages, to make the heroine find a simple method of triumphing. (Had I made the attacker a brother, father or other familiar person, issues of family etc. would enter in.) I hope you see my point on this—I may have been writing a novel and this was a short story.

I do know that one of the old attitudes of 50 or more years ago, among women (mothers advising daughters, friends advising each other) was simply -- don't talk about this. I won't here discuss the pros and cons of silence. Also, (I am guessing that) assault on women truly has exponentially increased in the last half century. Yet, I have looked into the faces of women all my life, many elderly, and I am sure, it has to be a fact, that some percent of them went through assault. To the woman, they are standing on two feet, surviving. What the quality of their lives would have been if they had said something, or been understood, and/or had legal or other justice, is anyone's guess.

Betsy O. West, 2007 (E9thstsubstation@aol.com)