

WOVEN: Under the Bones

written by Guest Contributor | May 12, 2021



WOVEN is an Entropy series and dedicated safe space for essays by persons who engage with #MeToo, sexual assault and harassment, and #DomesticViolence, as well as their intersections with mental illness, substance addiction, and legal failures and remedies. We believe you. If selected for the series, we want to provide the editorial and human support such that our conversation continues long after the stories and names have changed. You can view submission guidelines for WOVEN [here](#).

Reread the [archives](#), always.

Image Credit: [Ryan White](#)

My dad cried when I was born, not happy tears. Tears because I wasn't a boy. This was a recurring story I heard growing up. I pretended it didn't bother me. But somewhere inside his rejection hurt, leaving a hole, a tear in the fabric of me.

My father disliked girls and women because he was rejected by his mother and taught by his father that women fell into one of two categories – whores or wives. The former tools of utility and occasional pleasure. The latter servants to a patriarchal order, established to ensure a man's legacy.

My father came from trauma, scarcity, repression and rage. There was an abundance of moonshine, loss, sadness and sex. Sex without love. Sex as sin, a release of shame and rage. Of unencumbered love and connection – he knew nothing.

*

We went to church when the doors were open as all pious, evangelicals do. We repented. We prayed. We existed in the shadows and the secrets, begging for forgiveness.

Church is where I first learned to tolerate discomfort politely. My father required I sit on his lap. On Sundays I served a purpose in the grander scheme of maintaining his appearance. In a happy family, a girl wants to sit on her father's lap. Only I never wanted to. It was uncomfortable and awkward there, the opposite of safe. I would wriggle to get free. He would clinch tighter. Beneath my ruffled, Sunday dress bulged a heat and pressure rising from him into me, a thing a five-year-old can't comprehend, but still understands is wrong. This happened week after week after week for as long as I can remember until I forgot it altogether.

Sometimes my mom would ask me the following day if there was something I needed to tell her. This would also make me cringe and squirm. She would say my father reported I moved "strangely" on his lap, that I made him uncomfortable. I thought this was part of every girl's experience with her father in church. I don't go to church anymore. But I have learned how to talk to god.

*

My budding breasts and curves emerged fast and with force, catching everyone by surprise. I started taping them when I turned ten. This was shortly after their arrival, in desperate need to keep them secret. Hyper aware of the attention they drew and the wrongfulness that attention might indicate about me.

In that same church where I had sat uncomfortably on my father's lap, both the gift and art of my body were seen as sin, abominations to be handled firmly and with conviction. This meant my body and my sexuality were problems to solve, not worlds to explore.

Other boys and men who weren't my father showed interest in my budding physical features, making me believe my body wasn't *all* bad. That felt confusing, and also like relief. I was moving on some obscure tightrope from rejection to desire, longing for love.

I observed friends with their fathers, studying how they looked at their daughters with affection. This was entirely foreign. For as far as I could tell, my dad's experience of me was marked by anxiety and disdain. Ensuring my purity was simply another burden to carry. My whole story with my father was bound up in this movement between love and hate, vulnerability and shame, right and wrong. Our relationship a tug of war between annihilation and possibility.

*

After nearly starving it to death, I attempted to learn to love my body again. But I couldn't find a memory when this problematic body belonged to me, when it felt good under my skin. My body had been colonized, leaving me lost inside myself, buried somewhere in a combination of nostalgia and loathing for a demure, cunning feminine sensibility that lingers still in the Deep South. Most of my twenties and thirties were spent trying to love that body back to life, that body had been so badly hurt, and no longer gave a damn about pleasing anyone else. Forgetting everyone else was the first hurdle. Learning to love myself is the body of work that followed.

Time passed. I took medication and went to therapy. I got a job and a dog and house. I also got married. I faked orgasms. I drank too much wine to help me leave the body behind. I was better, but still with broken things inside. I folded the broken things carefully and with intention, like winter clothes when summer comes, and tucked them so far back in the closet that I almost forgot they were there. Until I gave birth to my son.

For some reason after he was born, the emaciated, eighteen-year-old, stack of bones girl with so little self-love started violently shaking and screaming in the closet at night. I didn't recognize her initially, but she called for me in a low, guttural moan like an animal dying begging to be reparented. She smelled of honeysuckle and when she wasn't moaning, she hummed hymnals through a shaky jaw. Slowly her memories, which were also mine, demanded integration. I thought she'd been buried, that accidentally—or on purpose—his unresolved rage had killed her.

I tossed and turned. I bought ear plugs. I took Unisom, Ativan, Prozac. I tried everything to quiet her noise. The therapist suggested EDMR. But the girl in the closet with rattling bones scoffed. Tired of being sedated, insistent on not being silenced, she demanded I listen. If I was going to raise a son who would grow up to be a man who honored a woman – then I had to first love and forgive the girl inside me. She told me this over and over again. Until I said it myself.

*

Trauma makes you do unimaginable things – hurt yourself, starve yourself, cut yourself, talk to yourself, break rules, end healthy relationships, endure broken ones. It leaves in its wake sabotage and wreckage. And a tremendous crevasse to fill. The skeleton girl who'd managed to survive so much and travel so far was now a 40-year-old, woman-girl-mother-daughter-wife, who just wanted a decent night's sleep. Desperate for rest and peace, I found a therapist in a robust network of underground practitioners and healers who'd made these kinds of spiritual wounds their specialty.

Six weeks later, weaned from anti-anxiety and depression meds, the skeleton girl and I made our way to the therapist's office. We met in the studio over her garage, situated in the thickness of the woods with the winter sun filtering through the Douglas Firs as I sipped a mug of teal green psilocybin tea. It smelled like earth and tasted like dirt. We'd been preparing for this sacred reunion staged in an altered space beyond logic and reason, deep in my subconscious where the protective mechanisms of ego give way to unfiltered truth. I'd named my skeleton girl, Vigilance, and our conversation came first.

I lay on my therapist's grey, velvety couch, a mask covering my eyes and I waited for Vigilance to come. As the medicine began to work its way through my cells, I felt a sharp, tingling sensation, something like when your foot falls asleep and wakes. Only this tingling spanned from the crown of my head to the tips of my toes and everywhere in between. Like a dead part inside me resurrecting, coming back online and localizing finally in my womb space.

I felt Vigilance first as this awakening from numb. Then I saw that she was the five-year-old girl inside of me, in the church, running through the halls and the fields in her backyard. Trying to hide. Scrubbing her hands and her body, hoping to wash away a filth and shame that wasn't hers but got passed down the generational line.

Eyes closed again; I saw her clearly. The same age as my son. I saw my father also. But not as my father, rather as his five-year-old little boy self, running and chased through the fields of his boyhood. Another childhood lost in the void.

In the midst of that great expansive field, the three of us stood there together and apart, so young and tender before the hurt place took over. I saw us like stair steps of possibility, death and resurrection. The promise of innocence. The tragedy of childhood lost to unresolved pain.

Inside Vigilance, underneath those rattling bones, rested my voice, my orgasm, my creativity, my rage and the deepest essence of my love. My power pulsed out from her. With my son on one side and my father on the other – the path forward was clear. The pain story ends with me. I took my son's hand and we walked out of those scarce fields, into the golden sun, never looking over our shoulders. Vigilance used to be a bird in a cage with clipped wings. But not anymore.



Raised by evangelicals on a farm in rural Tennessee, **Micah Stover** is now far from home in Mexico where she resides with her family and

works as an integrative support therapist with trauma survivors. Micah is currently writing and revising a memoir, chronicling the path to heal intergenerational trauma and PTSD with psilocybin and guided psychotherapy.