

# Residual Flashbacks

*by* Fiona Johnson

Residual flashbacks; just tiny bright lightning bolts that flash in front of my eyes, just like standing watching a soaring bonfire on a cold and frosty November night, pinprick sparks flying up into the endless darkness of the night.

Beep, beep.

That's how it appears to me, the flashes are pretty much faded away now, more like an echo way off in the past; still there, always there, but weaker. They've also lost most of their power but just sometimes — just sometimes, one flares up and hits me in the stomach and memory comes into sharp focus. The pain. The humiliation. The embarrassment. The anger. The hurt. Yes, it can still hurt, believe me.

Beep, beep.

I've never spoken about this before and nobody has ever spoken to me, although I'm sure they talked amongst themselves, my friends, debating whether they should say something or whether that would be too cruel and upsetting for me. Perhaps they asked their mothers for advice. I wonder what they said? Did they look at me differently when I came to visit?

Beep, beep.

Children are amazing little creatures, I can see that now because I've looked into the eyes of so many damaged children. They still manage to be happy, to love, to forgive adults no matter how badly

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they have been treated. And that was me too. I never realized that what was happening to me was wrong. Understanding came suddenly and powerfully much later.... and then it hurt. Then I was ashamed.

Beep, beep.

Do parents even know what they are doing to their child? I have thought about this a lot as I've struggled with forgiveness. Was it meant? Who noticed? Have I lived alone with this secret burden my whole life? I still don't know the answer to these questions and I probably never will.

Beep, beep.

I was at primary school when I first realized that there was a problem. Probably ten years old. The class was having a gym lesson in the afternoon and I wouldn't be able to cover up, I can remember it clearly, I was with my friend Shona and we were in the Infants toilet. I felt sick and embarrassed but couldn't tell her why. So I made an excuse, I lied. I wonder if she believed me?

Beep, beep.

I can't actually remember the lesson. Funny that. I wonder what happened? But I remember that sudden realization and from that moment to this a hard nugget of sadness has lain in my chest. Yes, there's been happy times along the way but sometimes, when I'm alone, I can feel it there; a hard black nugget of neglect, pulsing slowly beside my heart.

Beep, beep.

My own children don't know about this part of my childhood. They've heard about the white bunny rabbits and the pony, the

caravan holidays and seaside trips. What would they think of their grandparents if they knew? Would they believe me? Anyway, it would be too cruel to tell them, all gone now anyway, another life.

Beep, beep.

Becoming a teenager, young, maybe thirteen or fourteen and life hadn't improved. Was it worse? I don't know. Felt pretty bad to me. Hormones rushing through my body, feeling like an overgrown child, arms and legs that seemed to have a mind of their own and a deep need to be accepted, to be part of the group at High School.

Beep, beep.

Still nobody said anything to me. Some days it must have been so obvious. I'd have thought a kind teacher might have intervened. Isn't that what they are supposed to do? I suppose it was the 70s, maybe things have changed in schools now, maybe if I was at school now something would be done. But would it help or would kindness only make matters worse? That's a strange one.

Beep, beep.

So I've still got more questions than answers. After all of these years I'm still trying to puzzle my childhood out. I've got a feeling that there aren't any answers to be found; just acceptance of what happened and then moving on. Going back to blame is pretty pointless. The damage has been done. And who's to say I'm not damaging my own kids in some other more subtle way? I hope not.

Beep, beep, beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep.

I let go of my mother's hand and walked away.

