

Dear Laurie, today is my birthday and I had a very nice day. I'm sorry I seem to get defeated so easily.
Ana

Dear Ana, happy belated birthday! I'm pleased you had a very nice day. Getting defeated is nothing to apologize about, as far as I'm concerned. You are not a person who gives up even when you get defeated. Am I right about that? Please be gentle with yourself. My Best, Laurie

Dear Laurie, I try to convince myself I'm going to give up, but then something happens inside, and a little part of me starts to come alive again. I feel the beauty of everything around me, and the love of my children, husband, and friends ... and I don't want to give up after all. Thank you for not giving up on me, even when I think I want to give up on myself. Love, Ana

Dear Ana, that little part that starts to come alive again is a bigger part of you than it feels like, even at those times when you want to give up. I have seen that clearly in you from the very start of meeting you. It has never crossed my mind even to wonder about giving up on you. Please be gentle with yourself. My Best, Laurie

Dear Laurie, I do believe there is a strength within that keeps me from giving up. There have been some special things that have happened in my life that have given me inner strength. I would like to share one of those things with you, a memory from my youth ...

THE WHITE HOUSE ON A HILL

In the cluttered pages of my youth, dwells a solitary memory: a white house on a hill, boarded and shuttered, its dark rooms hidden, silent, and still. But that boarded up, lonely house was as welcoming to me as if its doors and windows were flung open, wide and embracing of the soft summer breezes. It still has the power, in just the remembrance of it, to still my soul.

The day I discovered the house stands apart in my memory. Leaving the well-travelled road behind, I climbed over one of the broken-down fences that crisscrossed the green rolling hills, keeping one farmer's sheep from the next. The earth was warm and fragrant below my feet, and the song of meadowlarks hung in the air all around.

I was more escaping than searching and coming suddenly upon the house I nearly turned back, fearing I was an intruder. However, the quiet and still drew me forward. Opening the gate of the white picket fence, I stepped into the perfectly manicured front yard and waited. No human sound, no greeting or fall of footstep broke the stillness of that moment.

Then, as now, there was no framework, no reference, no space within my world that could explain that house. It sat alone on the top of a hill, surrounded by seas of grass waving in the summer sun, without even a path to lead one to its gate. The house was abandoned, all the windows and doors covered with weathered boards. Despite its forlorn visage, I was at once drawn to it and claimed it as my own.

The lawn and gardens that surrounded the house were perfectly tended and kept. However, in all the years I sought peace and refuge there, I never met another person. Someone, someone who belonged to that house and its past, still cared enough to keep the weeds at bay, and the gardens and

lawn clipped and neat. I wonder if they ever knew of my visits and that I too had become a part of the life of that house, for surely, I had.

That house became for me a refuge, sanctuary, and home. I spent hours under the sheltering branches of the wind bent oaks, watching the sun glinting on the lazy river that flowed past in the distance.

Next to the house was a large, weathered barn. It, like the grounds, showed signs of loving care. Often, upon opening the wide swinging doors, a pile of new, sweet smelling hay would greet me. What joy to lie in the hay and watch the barn swallows dip and weave through the shafts of dusty sunlight streaming through the cracks in the wood, sending their plaintive calls down into the cool stillness where I lay, quiet and peaceful.

How many lovely hours I spent sitting on the soft green grass, hidden in the golden hay, or working in the garden alongside that hidden other whose toil joined mine. As the days melted into months, and the months into years, that house on the hill became part of the tapestry of my life and heart. I gained strength and courage, felt comfort and solace, and found a way to navigate the troubled years of my teens in the sheltering embrace of that house ... my house ... my home.

Yes, even now, decades later, that house has the power, in just the remembrance of it, to still my soul. The calm and beauty of those days spent in the sheltering arms of the house upon a hill will be a part of me forever and can often surprise me with strength and peace amid life's dark and heavy moments.

So, Laurie ... that's my story. Sometimes, I can barely believe it's true and that such a place exists. I know it to be true, however, because a few years ago, I went back and visited my house. It was a remarkable journey and someday I will share it with you. It means the world to be able to share this memory with you. Love, Ana

Dear Ana, your wonderful story made me feel both sadness and joy for the beauty and calm that you were able to find for yourself there, when you were young. Your description is wonderful to read; it makes me almost feel like I have been to that "white house on a hill." Thank you so much for telling me this beautiful, amazing memory. I will be looking forward to someday hearing about your journey back to this marvelous place of your youth. My Best, Laurie

Continued ...

Excerpt from *Mending the Shattered Mirror: A Journey of Recovery from Abuse in Therapy*

By Analie Shepherd

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