

When I was younger, I wore the smile of someone who had it all together. I was a high-functioning, good grades, always-fine kind of girl. My brother called me “golden girl” because everything I touched seemed to work out. But under that practiced smile was something else entirely: shame.

Not the obvious kind, mind you.

Not the "caught red-handed" kind. But the quiet kind. The invisible kind that seeps in when families keep secrets. When we learn—without anyone saying it—that certain things are just *not to be talked about*.

In my case, it was my father’s drinking and carousing. I didn’t tell my friends. I didn’t talk about it with teachers. And to this day, I don’t think anyone in my family talks about it either.

I’m talking about it now because that silence became the container for my shame.

Now, I’m not saying we should air every wound for the world to see.

But I *am* saying this: when no one is allowed to name what happened, no one is allowed to heal from it either. ***That’s the toxic tradeoff of silence.***

Psychologists have long tied shame to fear—particularly the fear of disconnection. We think, *if they knew this about me, they'd walk away*. So we bury it. We tell ourselves it wasn't that bad. We numb it with perfectionism or people-pleasing. We smile, we always seem to smile.

But shame thrives in secrecy. And it dies in the light.

The research of Brené Brown puts it perfectly:

“Shame needs three things to grow exponentially in our lives: secrecy, silence, and judgment.”

I had all three. And I've spent a lifetime unwinding that wiring—learning to tell the truth, even when it's messy. Especially when it's messy.

And here's the thing: even now, even after doing years of work, I still notice little pockets of old shame that have a hold on me. They show up in hesitation. In fear of being seen. In holding back when I should be stepping forward.

That's why I'm talking about it now.

Because if you're carrying shame—whether it's fresh or decades old—you need to know it doesn't have to define your future. There *are* ways to loosen its grip and reclaim your wholeness.

5 Research-Backed Ways to Start Shedding Shame and Living in Full Bloom:

1. Name it out loud—but only to someone safe. Dr. Daniel Siegel coined the phrase “name it to tame it.” When you speak the thing you’ve been hiding—especially in the presence of someone empathetic—you begin to deactivate the emotional charge. This alone can be a powerful form of release.

2. Write the story as it actually happened. Narrative therapy research shows that when you take ownership of your own story by writing it down *truthfully*, it gives you power over it, instead of the other way around. You become the storyteller—not the shame.

3. Separate shame from guilt. Shame says, “*I am bad.*” Guilt says, “*I did something bad.*” Neuroscience shows guilt can be productive and corrective. Shame, on the other hand, is paralyzing. Start catching those internal statements and reframe them with compassion.

4. Engage in identity-based affirmation. In studies by Stanford psychologist Geoffrey Cohen, people who engaged in short exercises affirming *who they are (not what they did)* showed long-lasting improvements in mental and physical health. Try writing down three values that define who you want to be and revisit them daily.

5. Practice nervous system regulation. Shame isn't just psychological—it's physiological. It shows up in your posture, breath, and heart rate. Practices like breathwork, cold exposure, and somatic movement (like gentle shaking or stretching) can help move stored emotion out of the body. This is biology, not just woo.

You don't need to carry it forever. And you're not alone if it's still lingering.

There's more to say here. A lot more. I'm going deeper into this story—and what I've learned about shame, healing, and reclaiming your voice—over on my Substack.

This is the conversation we need to be having—it's time to vanquish shame once and for all.