

# This Is...

Summer 2020 Edition

*Alana*  
L I M A

CATCHING UP ON HOW SHE'S  
TURNED HER SIDE HUSTLE  
INTO HER FULL-TIME JOB

## NEWSWORTHY

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Changing the Way  
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# The Changes Issue

READ ABOUT RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SYSTEMIC RACISM, WHITE PRIVILEGE, AND  
THE BLM MOVEMENT, ABOUT ONE GIRL'S JOURNEY TO FINDING THE LIGHT IN A DIMMING WORLD,  
A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING, AN INTERRACIAL'S JOURNEY TO BECOMING PARENTS, & MORE!

# THE ART OF LOSING IT

A MEMOIR OF  
GRIEF AND ADDICTION



ROSEMARY KEEVIL

[ V U L N E R A B L E ]

When her brother dies of AIDS and her husband dies of cancer in the same year, Rosemary is left on her own with two young daughters and antsy addiction demons dancing in her head. This is the nucleus of *The Art of Losing It*: a young mother jerking from emergency to emergency as the men in her life drop dead around her; a high-functioning radio show host waging war with her addictions while trying to raise her two little girls who just lost their daddy; and finally, a stint in rehab and sobriety that ushers in a fresh brand of chaos instead of the tranquility her family so desperately needs.

Heartrending but ultimately hopeful, *The Art of Losing It* is the story of a struggling mother who finds her way—slowly, painfully—from one side of grief and addiction to the other.

# PEEFACE: THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF BULLYING

By: Rosemary Keevil - author of *The Art of Losing It*

I am seven years old and completely naked, flying to school Superman style. I land at the back of my grade-two classroom by the lockers, totally exposed to the boys and girls and the teacher who are mulling about preparing for the start of the school day. All eyes fixate on all of me. How could I have been so stupid as to come to school nude? I am deeply ashamed.

This recurring dream from 57-years ago exposes burgeoning self-esteem issues. The nightmare is as vivid as the memories of my fellow classmates being mean to me: David Abes sitting behind me, poking the top of my head with a freshly sharpened pencil; Susan Wishbone stomping up to me as I am walking home from school and slapping me hard across the face; and everyone calling me "Peeface." I was also the only pupil in my grade-one class who didn't receive a single Valentine's Day card. The teacher picked up a stray Valentine from the floor and tossed it on my desk. I was routinely excluded from playing with the neighbourhood girls and their sleek Barbie dolls I so deeply coveted. All I had was a clunky Chatty Cathy—my family couldn't afford to keep up with the current Mattel trends.

Yes, I was bullied, probably because I had buckteeth, which gave me a notable lisp. Paw, paw Wothemawee Pawwett (translation: Poor, poor Rosemary Parrett) could not say her r's or her s's. I went to speech therapy sessions every Wednesday afternoon from kindergarten to grade three to fix the lisp. Then, in grade seven, I got braces to fix the buckteeth. (Thanks, Mom.) When I think back, I was not aware of my speech impediment being related to my being bullied. In fact, I never really dwelled on any of it until recently during a weekend-long personal development workshop. I registered for this workshop because of a desire to understand why, at 64-years old, I have bouts of self-hatred and general self-esteem issues that did not seem to crystallize until the last few years.

It is common knowledge today that bullying affects the victim's self-esteem. However, the truth is, my life has been a quagmire of experiences that fed the low- self-esteem animal.

My father was a mad alcoholic, and my mother was his master enabler. Adult children of alcoholics often have feelings of unworthiness and shame. I am a case in point. I believe the shame is related to our family secrets: We lived in chaos with four young children, two drooling St. Bernards, two cranky cats, and the toxic duo that was my mother and father. I learned early in life that the outside world could never be privy to the tumult inside our home.

When I think about it now, my life has brimmed with acts of meanness.

Susan Wishbone, David Abes, and my grade one teacher were all mean.

The nickname "Peeface": That was mean.

Kids in my grade six class used to say, "Your sister's so pretty. What happened to you?" That was mean. Mom gave me a Raggedy Ann doll for Christmas, which I treasured, and then she took it back. The doll had to be returned

to the seamstress who lived up the street. Mrs. Christiansen made the Raggedy Ann, and Mom had borrowed it because we could not afford to buy it. That was mean.

Dad was mean when he came home drunk and threw pots and pans around the kitchen. He'd stomp upstairs screaming for my mom, "Helen, Helen, Helen, Helen..." getting louder and louder as he came closer. He would find her in my room, hiding in my bed with me. He would come to a halt in the doorway, spitting as he yelled, gesticulating in silhouette.

My father's anger was never directed at me. He only yelled at Mom and my two older brothers. This, I have learned, was a sick form of neglect: I wasn't good enough to get any of this kind of attention.

When I was 37-years old, my husband died of cancer and my brother died of AIDS within six-months of each other. I was left with two little girls to raise on my own. Now, that was life being mean.

I trounced on the trauma with alcohol, cocaine, and pharmaceuticals. Even this self-destruction, which lasted six-years, was another manifestation of meanness: me being mean to myself. (I am currently 17 years clean and sober.)

Heck, it's no wonder I woke up in my early 60s shrouded in a cloud of unworthiness. The world has been heaving meanness at me since I learned to speak.

I never thought much about how all this meanness might have impacted my spirit and self-worth: I did feel lesser than the bullies in elementary school, my beautiful sister, and my friends in high school who had matching towels in their bathrooms. I did have shame and self-loathing when I was drinking and drugging, which I thought I had addressed with my diligent 12-Step work. I never connected the dots before. Most times in my life I was oblivious to self-hatred: as a child, despite the turmoil, I knew my parents loved me; as a teenager in high school I was smart, popular, and athletic; as a university student, when I smoked a lot of dope, which must have masked my deeper feelings; as a young, married mother with a husband who doted on me; as a grieving widow and sister; as a divorcée with two struggling teens; and as an ambitious journalist searching for her platform.

Maybe the reason I'm connecting the dismal dots now is because I have the time to: I am not suffering from acute grief; my children are happy and successful; I have a loving and supportive partner; I am clean and sober; and I am semi-retired with more time on my hands.

It took an intensive, introspective and, at times, agonizing personal development workshop for me to recognize the mean demons in my life and then begin the exorcism process. This has given me the opportunity to start healing my sores and attempt to treat myself in a kinder, gentler fashion, acknowledging the trauma of my life and its harsh effect on my self-esteem. Now a new journey begins as I experiment with self-love. How am I doing so far?