



## Being Mean: A Memoir of Sexual Abuse and Survival

**Patricia Eagle**

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*Being Mean is a scalding personal account of enduring, and healing from, childhood sexual abuse.*

Patricia Eagle's searing memoir *Being Mean* is about her rise from the ashes of sexual abuse.

Chronicling Eagle's life from the ages of four to sixty-five, *Being Mean* excavates the caverns of her childhood trauma to expose how its tendrils tormented her long after the horrible fact. A confused child—desperate for her father's approval but uncertain of the meaning of their "special times"—gives way to a timid teenager struggling to untangle shame and burgeoning sexuality.

Fleeing the dysfunctional example of her parents, Eagle sought a fresh start in university, but found only a cycle of depression, insecurity, risky sexual behaviors, and broken relationships awaiting her. It was a self-destructive pattern that she spent decades learning and relearning how to break.

Eagle's account is harrowing in its honesty, relaying miscarriages and abortions in graphic, heartbreaking detail—both the procedures and their emotional aftermath. Her failed marriages are also explored. Eagle never shies away from the lies, infidelities, and misguided compromises that led to their dissolution. Pain pulses from the pages in these sections, but the constant presence of supportive friends and family is a sanguine reminder that shadows are always paired with light.

Traumatic as the shaping circumstances of Eagle's childhood are, she never uses them as a shield. She reflects back on her lackadaisical attitudes toward sex as flinging herself toward "sexual suicide ... trying to hit the G-spot of instantaneous self-comprehension and self-acceptance." Such frank analyses are refreshing and may provide empathetic assurance to other victims who are still in the gauntlet of recovery. Decades of therapy, meditation, journaling, psychiatric medications, and other coping mechanisms posit a helpful road map.

Chapters are headed with years and Eagle's age during their events, presented chronologically with chapters of flashback added to illuminate details. "Being mean" is revealed to be a euphemism for masturbation, as Eagle's mother was uncomfortable with technical terms surrounding sexuality, but it is often also applied to her father's tyrannical behavior. Such parallels add to the book's sense of unfurling a tapestry. Phrases and scenarios repeat to demonstrate how their meaning or significance changes across Eagle's life. On occasion, this structure lends itself to redundancy, with well-known characters or places described in similar verbiage across multiple chapters.

Song lyrics, poetry, excerpts from nature books, and other references dapple the text, giving chapters a firmer sense of time and place. All sources are marked and listed in well-organized credits and notes sections, and back matter also includes a list of resources for those struggling with childhood sexual abuse.

*Being Mean* is a scalding personal account of enduring, and healing from, childhood sexual abuse.

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE (May 14, 2019)

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