

The White Line

-an excerpt from *If Broken Hearts Could Talk*, Janell Rardon

On my 6th birthday, as a first grader at Holy Spirit Catholic School, I had to stand on the ominous white line that ran along the serpentine sidewalk leading to the front entrance of the mysterious convent.

There I stood, that fateful October afternoon—knock-kneed, rocking a pair of white go-go boots—in hopes of countering the starched red-checked traditional uniform—center stage for the entire school to see. Instead of playing with my friends, I stood alone. My impressionable little heart breaking into a million pieces. If memory serves me, I was being publicly punished for talking too much in class.

Recollecting this fateful day, I was too little to grasp what was happening at the time, but now see clearly that a door was opening into the fabric of my soul; one that led to years of equating behavior with approval and acceptance. My sister, in the eighth grade at the time, recalls watching my peers scoff as they walked by. In response to hearing my hysteric crying she rushed across the playground to help me. Promptly, the nuns refrained her, “It is for her good. Leave her alone.”

The sting of those five words took root. *It is for her good.*

It seems that from a very young age, my inability to remain silent was an issue. God bless those nuns, but why, oh, why did they choose such a demeaning form of external punishment? I was six years old. Seriously, just take me outside and talk to me. Rarely does external punishment precede true change. Maybe a bright red “T” should have been embroidered onto my stiff white peter-pan collared blouse.

What stands out most in this memory isn’t the humiliation, the embarrassment or the sneers and snickers from the other children—even though that treatment was harsh—the most vivid memory that remains is missing out on playtime and the fact that I was standing all alone on that shame-filled white line.

All alone—or so I thought.

Looking through the crystal clear lens of hindsight, perhaps God was preparing me for this very moment. He knew I was going to talk too much. He knew I was going to stand-alone. He knew I might ruffle the feathers of established religious expectations (represented by the legalities of the nuns, who I innocently trusted) and sometimes color outside the lines or step “off the white line” of expectations and restrictions, even when administered by people I love very much.

Meet Red Tail (RT)

It seems from a very young age that the devil himself, who I will *unaffectionately* call, “Red Tail” (RT), has had a very strong foothold in my life (Ephesians 4:27, New Living Translation). Those formative years, when 85% of our personality is developed, were spent in the presence of very strict nuns who unknowingly impressed their rigidity on my tender frame.

Not only did I talk too much, I also innately wanted to do the right thing and have very distinct memories of my need to please. Right then and there, I began equating obedience with being sure I “toed the *white* line.”

Don't have too much fun and by all means, live life according to the standards of someone else—even if those standards are NOT God's true standards for enjoying life.

A Small Crack in a Little Girl's Heart

Why do I share all this? Because maybe, like me, you remember a “white line” on your life map. A time when an impression was made that perhaps changed your perception, left a dent in your sense of self or actually initiated a fracture in your heart of hearts. Or worse, cast such a far-reaching shadow over your life that you fear what might happen if you step off the white line?