

# REFLECTIONS *SPEAKING AND HEARING* By Barbara Snow



Women growing up in the South (such as myself) used to be trained in the social graces. As a child, that meant to me pretending, like the long-suffering Melanie in "Gone with the Wind," who seemed to be the role model for most of the women I knew, never confronting any injury, always apparently loving and forgiving. There were a few brave individuals who were as blatantly manipulative and as openly temperamental as Scarlet O'Hara, and I secretly envied them the courage to

throw temper tantrums once I noticed how people tiptoed around them and catered to their wishes to maintain an uneasy truce. Still, silence and passive acceptance seemed the norm, an unflinching pretense that felt but never confronted hurt or betrayal openly, certainly not directly to another person in a relationship. The result was the layering on of hurts, never knowing whether they were intentional or even real, relying on one's own perceptions. The force of words stampeding through one's brain created

distance from others and even from one's own body and experience, a lonely distance that isolated rather than comforted. At least that was how it seemed to me.

It takes great courage to begin telling oneself the truth, and even greater courage to begin taking action to find out if your perception is real. What is gnawing at your belly that you don't want to face because you resist taking action in your own behalf? Does someone who claims to love you not listen to what you say, not give you attention or affection, or compassionate presence when life hits you hard? If any of those things are your experience, how are you responding? Are you asking to be heard, asking for what you need, insisting on support? If not, why not? Do you not believe you have the right to be treated lovingly or do you not know what loving treatment is? Are you afraid that somehow it is your fault, that you are not lovable enough? Or do you simply not want to make the effort to change things? Are you getting some kind of payoff by being a victim that consoles you and lets you glide along the status


quo without reaching for more?

Once something jolts us into facing our perceived truth, we have the option of checking it out. This is where we can really show up for life, by asking the questions we are afraid to hear the answers to. It is important to ask them of ourselves and to answer them honestly. If we don't like what is happening, why not? What would we want to happen instead? Why? It is important to talk with those who are part of our situation to stimulate genuine exchange of thoughts, feelings and experience. We engage the conversation to learn what is real, knowing that others may or may not respond the way we want them to. We speak because we must, because is essential to our personal integrity. When we find the courage to test whether the stories we have been telling ourselves are true, we lose our fear of the truth, and we gain the chance to change the stories and our experience.


When what we say is heard and acted upon, we feel loved. When someone pauses and focuses on us, we feel important. When we speak our truth and no action results, we feel

ignored and diminished. When we tolerate being ignored and diminished, we lose self-respect. When we do not speak, it is out of fear of feeling diminished. We make room for lots of stories to tell ourselves that may comfort but ultimately defeat us. When we speak, we take a stand in our own behalf. We honor what we feel, who we are, and what we want. We show ourselves, to others but especially to ourselves. Others always see us more than we think they do, even when they do not interact with us in ways we want. By speaking up and being more genuine, we invite, perhaps even require, that they be more genuine, too.

Whether they react as we want or not, we get information about the dynamics between us that reveal what is possible or not, so speaking up always brings us a little closer to getting what we want. There is usually grieving to do when we know the truth. Healing happens when we detached enough to know that we are OK no matter what someone else does. When we can love ourselves and yet feel compassion for all involved in a situation, we have accepted the experience as another valuable lesson in our process of growth as a human being and expansion as a soul.





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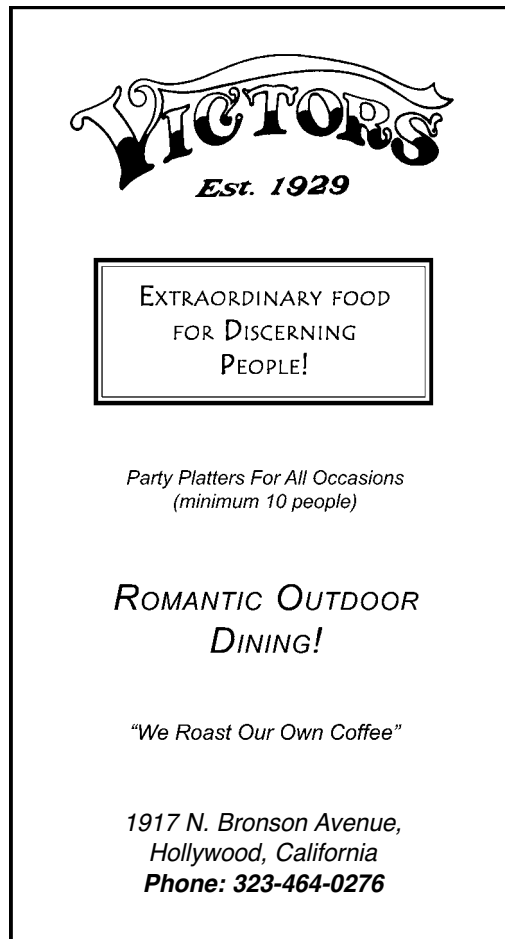
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—Sarah Ban Breathnach