

Silent No More

Early Indications of Boundary Violations

As I watched her smile during our first session in 2011, I knew I had found the right counselor. Not only was Kim a Christian in my hometown of Greensboro, NC but she had personally told me that she specialized in treating women with my past history of abuse. I looked forward to the sessions each week because there was something comforting about seeing her but I couldn't have put it into words at the time.

Now, though, I can see that my own pain and trauma took the back seat to her expressing her own past hurts, abuse, and troubled marriage. This was a familiar pattern in my life...giving others power over me.

But, as the weeks turned into months a knot in my stomach began to form as her personal story often overshadowed my needs during our sessions. What she shared in no way related to what I was in counseling for. She easily shared about:

- ~the "love of her life" (not her husband), and how to this day he is still not married and loves her dearly
- ~her sex life with her husband (I won't go into details here)
- ~her husband's non-existent spiritual life
- ~how she considers her husband revengeful because he wouldn't attend a funeral for the child of a former client
- ~how she's thinking about divorce
- ~her abuse that was worse than the abuse I received at the hands of my father because hers "happened in the teen years"
- ~her husband being unforgiving towards her since she had an affair with the "love of her life" and that is why all the finances and the house are in his name
- ~ her husband, a lawyer in Greensboro, "makes a lot of money" and their house is "too big"
- ~her husband not liking her driving her convertible because he thinks she's trying to draw attention to herself
- ~his refusal to get the convertible fixed when it broke down so making her drive her son's car
- ~her fibromyalgia that makes her completely exhausted after work
- ~her husband not going to bed at the same time she goes to bed
- ~the strained relationship she has with one of her children
- ~ how her husband misses the mark as a father

As I saw it then, my only option was to speak to her supervisor about her personal sharing. But, I was afraid that would make Kim angry at me and then what would I do? She had already told me that she was the perfect counselor for me because she had experienced the same type of abuse as a child and healed from it. She spoke frequently, with tears in her eyes, of how her husband would say things that wounded her such as telling her one night that she talks too much. Since I knew this had hurt her, how could I then turn around and say the same thing? I wanted that healing, too, so surely I could over-look her excessive talking to get to it! So, I swallowed my concerns, ignored my intuition, and continued to march on through the journey to my hopeful and soon to be had healing.

"My son is really missing me at home so I've decided to start my own practice so I can be home when he is", she started one of our sessions with tears in her eyes. She told me that I could follow her to her own practice which would be ready in a few months. Later as I was leaving the session it didn't make sense to me. Her son

would be leaving for college before she even finished her move to the private practice. Once again, I disregarded my nagging doubts and continued seeing her at her new business.

As the months wore on, depression settled in, anxiety began, and panic attacks started appearing. She kept telling me that in counseling things get worse before they get better. Little did I know that seeing her meant that the worst would continue to get worse and I would eventually become a hermit in my own house. The care that Kim demanded by her excessive sharing started the Unseen Pain that I kept buried deep in my body. A great fear enveloped my heart and I started hiding from life.



With freedom from any supervision, she continued leading a support group for women that had similar backgrounds as I did. All the women that came to the group had been seeing her as their counselor for a year. She frequently told the group that she hoped we would “see each other as family and learn to depend on and support one another”. That’s when I began to retreat into myself.

The Great Puppeteer Creates a Cult, (err I mean) Family

Because Kim confidently told our support group to support and lean on each other “like family”, several of us eagerly went out to eat or visit at Starbucks after each meeting. Throughout the next year, (from 2012 to 2013) Kim actively taught co-dependency. When a member shared how she was cutting herself, Kim asked me and this other client into her office where we were told that I was going to be on the other client’s safety plan. That meant calling me when she needed help. I readily agreed since I knew Kim knew what was best for her clients. The problem was, this other client, later diagnosed with a mental illness, began calling me three times a day. The phone calls were so frequent and so long that I had to buy a different phone and calling plan because my husband and I could no longer afford the current bills.

This particular client would call me sitting outside Wal-Mart wanting to go in a buy a knife to cut herself, or working and wanting to use an exacto knife, or at home in the bath having just cut herself. Fearful of her committing suicide, I took all of her phone calls at the expense of my family and friends. My life very quickly became centered on Kim and the support group she was orchestrating. My other friends faded away and even my three kid’s needs were neglected to take care of group members. My sessions with Kim focused more and more on how to handle group member’s emergencies and needs and less and less on anything going on in my life. According to Kim, I was being a good friend.

After one support group meeting, Kim had me instruct one client’s husband about not only hiding all the knives in the house but also preventing her from taking baths as this was a trigger for her. Another time I spoke to a different client’s husband about putting her kids in day care because she was feeling so

overwhelmed dealing with her past abuse. Kim was regularly asking clients to go and check on other clients that she may have concerns about. It was not unusual for me to take a meal to one of her clients, sit with them when they were sad, or even when they had to make difficult phone calls. One time I drove a client to my own appointment with Kim and let her have my appointment as I saw her needs more important than my own. Kim didn't think twice to call me when a client was suicidal and have me go check on them. Not once, in the two years that I saw Kim, did she ever ask me how I was handling all these responsibilities. Fear became the only emotion I felt.

Sadly, Kim sometimes used our group to relish in self glory. She surprised us one evening by spending two hours sharing "her story". She confided in us concerning her abuse (being raped by a neighbor and then raped by multiple teens as a teenager) but the majority of her sharing was concerning the time she left her husband and had an affair with the "love of her life". We heard how she met him in high school, had two abortions, broke up with him while in college, then met her husband. They too had two abortions, later got married, then realizing she was in a marriage that she didn't want to be in, she and the "love of her life" came together once again. After seriously contemplating divorce, she finally ended the affair and went back with her husband. Although she did "the right thing" in telling her husband, he put all the finances and house in his name and to this day does not forgive her.

Kim had a captive audience, her own minions, to tell about still pining away for this man that could satisfy all her desires and not only how horrible her life is now but what a Christian saint she is to stay with her vindictive husband.

The co-dependency that Kim was assuredly teaching her underlings quickly degraded any sense I had of myself. Because I saw myself as a worthless rag used only to mop up other's messes, I quickly decided to permanently get rid of the little girl in me. I thought often of stabbing the pain out of me but Kim continued to encourage me, through her actions and words, to bury and forget this Unknowable Pain. There was no time or space for my pain amongst the pain of others. My hurts and silent screams went unheard. This just proved true all my core beliefs of being used, not worthy, not noticed and not important. The desire to harm myself became too strong to overcome.

USED

UNWORTHY

UNIMPORTANT

UNNOTICED PAIN

UNLOVEABLE

Replaceable

UNWANTED

UNSEEN

ABANDONED



As I did in my childhood,
I resolved to prove myself worthy
to Kim by taking care of her and
doing all she told me to do.

Eventually, I noticed that others from the group were receiving “friendly” texts from Kim. Befriending her other clients and regularly texting back and forth each week, Kim made my lack of self worth go to new depths. Why wasn’t I considered a friend? Did Kim just not like me? Was I not helping her out enough? Something must be wrong with me since she didn’t want to be my friend. And contradictory thoughts: Why is Kim befriending her own clients? Doesn’t she know how wrong this is? Again, though, I ignored my intuitions to support the greater good of the group/cult. Around this time, Kim began talking about other clients during my sessions. I later found out that Kim had been talking about me to one of her other clients from her cult, uh, I mean support group.

My husband refers to my life
as Pre-Kim and Post-Kim.

Pre-Kim, I was a women’s Bible Study leader, attended church every Sunday, entertained several families in my home every week, and regularly volunteered in my children’s school. Post-Kim, I locked myself in the house every day fearful to step outside. Just stepping into a church would cause a panic attack and forget about grocery shopping. It was all I could do to pick the kids up from school and often did that still in pajamas. Panic attacks were an everyday event, sometimes lasting for many hours. Because my mind was racing from one anxious thought to another, I no longer could engage much in life. Things I used to enjoy like reading, I could not focus my mind enough to do. Even walking outside was too fearful. Depression stalked me daily and frequently found me hiding under the covers in bed.

The Attempt to Set Boundaries

Somewhere along the path to drowning, I got a burst of courage and tried to establish boundaries with one of Kim’s clients that had been calling me regularly with emergencies. After telling this client that I was no longer going to be available to answer any of her phone calls, I received a phone call from Kim.

“Kelly, <the other client> is upset after your talk with her so it would be best if you and she meet with me in my office before our next meeting”

“I don’t feel safe in coming into your office with the other client. The boundary I set with her was that I would see her at group and when we get together with other friends. What you are asking is not within my boundaries.”

“But <this client> is very upset and doesn’t feel comfortable coming to group tonight”

“I am sorry Kim but I do not feel safe seeing the two of you in your office.”

“You guys have had a great friendship and she is just struggling now with you all of sudden setting these boundaries. She would just like to meet before group so you guys can talk through this.”

"I understand Kim, but I have already discussed this with her and I do not feel safe meeting with her in your office. I actually feel more comfortable coming to group tonight than I have in many months."

Trying to convince me to meet with her and her other client in order to smooth things over, Kim remained on the phone with me for 40 minutes. I do not know where I got the courage but I calmly told her over and over again that I would not be doing that. It is interesting to note that she never asked me why I didn't feel safe meeting in her office under these circumstances.

Being deceptively
strong, a web
is built to
capture prey so
the builder of the
web can suck the
life out of them.



All the intricacies of the web that Kim had conceived and weaved were about to rip through each of her clients lives. The thing about webs is they are deceptively strong and are built to capture their prey so the builder of the web can suck the life out of the captured. She had already sucked the life out of me. Once things started to unravel for Kim, she started working even harder to keep her prey stuck to her. She told one client that if she was going to continue to meet with someone outside the group to read the book Betrayal Bonds then she would have to stop seeing her for counseling. But, Kim added, if she chose to stop reading that book then Kim would see her for free twice a week. She then offered to buy another client some work clothes.

Finding My Voice

A woman with a voice
is by definition a
strong woman.
But the search to find
that voice can be
remarkably difficult.

-Melinda Gates

In the Spring of 2012, when a group member (A) didn't show for a previously canceled appointment, Kim decided to have a young group member (Z) check on her because she suspected the client was suicidal. Z called me to go pick up her three kids from school and told me she was very nervous about the kind of situation she was going to be walking into. I coordinated picking up her kids along with my kids and Z texted

me about what was happening at A's home. When Z showed up, A was frantically ripping up all of her journals and books. When A saw Z she started screaming for her to go away. A verbally assaulted Z by cursing and yelling things she knew would wound Z. This went on for an hour. While still ranting, A drank the largest bottle of Jack Daniels I have ever seen. After the alcohol was consumed Kim showed up at A's front door. At this, A became aggressive and started to continually bang her head against the cement floor. As this was happening, A began to change personalities several different times. Z later said that Kim looked very nervous and shaken. Kim and Z attempted to hold down A's legs and arms and head as they wrestled with A. for over an hour. When the alcohol finally took hold of A and she quieted down some, Z found a medicine bottle of mixed pills that had spilt on the floor. She promptly flushed them down the commode. When Z finally passed out completely in her bed, Kim turned to Z and said, "I know I'm leaving A in capable hands. I've got tickets to a concert so I need to leave."

Later that night Kim texted Z telling her "having fun at the concert!"

Since Z and I were very close friends, and because she was very young, I was furious that Kim had not only sent her, but never prepared her for what she would be walking into, and then LEFT her there without knowing what to do. I did not have words to protect myself against Kim but I found many words to protect someone I loved from being used like I was being used. During my next session with Kim, I told her she was wrong to send Z to check on A especially not knowing what she was going to walk into. After a heated discussion that lasted over an hour I told Kim I was no longer going to be seeing her and I left....heartbroken.

One of the things that has been very difficult to understand is how much I cared for Kim and how much I still want her to care not only about me but also about all she did to me. It creates a lot of conflict in me still to this day, a year and a half later.

Sadly, this is not the end of the story.

Trying to Get Back Into the Family

*Because I was no longer seeing Kim,
this meant I was no longer welcome
in the family.*

I tried to hold on to the friendships by meeting them after their support group at Starbucks but a dull awful ache was always present in my heart...like a stab wound that wouldn't heal. Unfortunately, I mentioned to A that I wished Kim cared about me. Without me knowing it, she took the initiative to email Kim and encourage her to reach out to me and pursue me. In a few days, I received a page long email from Kim, not apologizing for all the pain she had caused, not about using me to meet her own needs, but to tell me we needed to get back to what we do best, counseling and healing from past abuse. I was so shaken when I received it. But, I kept my composure as I replied by email saying that after much prayer I was going to be seeking counseling from someone else.

That evening, as I was waiting to meet a fellow group member at Starbucks, I realized that group had ended a while ago but this member still wasn't at the coffee house. I went to the lobby of Kim's office and found this friend sitting on the floor with Kim who was crying. Because this friend was the young lady that Kim had

started using as she had used me, I stayed there until Kim's husband picked her up (Kim told us that her husband had forgotten to pick her up). After Kim left, my friend shared with me that Kim had showed A's email to her as well as my email. My friend was very angry at me that I would upset Kim in that way. That night I sent Kim an email asking her how it was ethical for her to share my email with Z. In reply, two days later, she sent a three page letter to A, Z, and myself telling us she had a bad day on Thursday when she broke our confidence but now she was going to go to counseling once a month and start to get massages to help the problem. She tells us that because she was "feeling defeated, confused, and weary at the end of the day...I listened to some of the enemy's lies and chose to forget my pledge and duty as a professional counselor". She goes on to tell us that she studied the ethical codes for counselors and concluded that her actions in asking Z to check on A were perfectly sound "despite Kelly saying otherwise". She further disparages me by telling them that my actions in asking another counselor for perspective on this matter was wrong and that I was not truthful in what I shared with them.

Kim assures us that she will improve her health so as to make sure this will not happen again. She promises to get more massages, exercise more, and get better sleep. She then closes with "I have been a counselor since 1987 and ironically, due to some great training at my graduate school, I was promoted to a supervisory position after less than 6 months on the job. Why? Because apparently I had earned a reputation as a clinically skilled and highly ethical clinician...tonight I think of that promotion and the supervisory jobs I have held at each place since, and I am completely humbled and saddened that I could allow myself to be so seduced by the Enemy's lies as to create so much pain as I did on "Black Thursday". She then wishes us a Happy Easter!

I receive this email and my pain explodes into a flood of tears, knowing that there was not to be healing in this for me. I didn't think the pain could be greater than what I was already carrying but evidently so. I wail for many hours not knowing where to go with the pain or how it was going to heal. Many days later I resolve that the only way the pain can be managed was to surely admit that all the mistakes were mine. I make an appointment with Kim and there apologize for all my many mistakes. I am unable to raise my eyes to hers the entire session. She thought it would be helpful to me if I acknowledge all the people I have hurt since March 18. I include my boys and husband (neglecting them), etc. At the end of the session, I am still not able to look at her. She asks if I have anything to apologize to her about. She tells me I was wrong to send her my email. When I don't respond, she suggests it might be easier for me if I email her a list of things that I had done to her.

During my son's next appointment with her (yes, my sons were also seeing her every week) she hands me a Charles Stanley book and tells me that she is thinking about using it for our support group. She says that as she was reading the first chapter of the book she thought of me. The first chapter was on Pride.


**I realized the pain in staying
was greater than the pain
in leaving.**

After that meeting, I decide that the pain in staying was greater than if I were to leave so I again tell Kim that I would not come again for counseling. She tells Z. during her counseling sessions that I am not following God and that I am running from friendships. She later tells her I am not in God's will. All of this further alienates me from my friends and my silence completely engulfs me as I become totally lost to myself.

All the pain and sadness that I was feeling was made worse by my friends that rallied around Kim during this time. I became the bad guy. The outsider. The one causing pain to our beloved guru, Kim. They never failed

to tell me that they believed what Kim was telling them about me. I became suicidal at one point, then obsessively suicidal later on. I tried unsuccessfully to bring health and interdependence into our friendships but it was always met with much resistance and with one friend expressing anger by yelling at me. It took me filing a complaint against Kim for all that she had done to me before I could extricate myself from these unhealthy friends. Ending these friendships brought the final blow (so I thought) to all the pain. Later I learned that another, even greater blow was coming to knock out of me what little trust I had developed since then.

Since leaving Kim a year and a half ago I have been seeing two counselors every week trying to heal from what was done to me. I kept quitting the counselor in Greensboro every time I realized I just couldn't trust again so I started seeing a counselor almost two hours away that I had seen 18 years earlier. Having the counselor that I had known for many years helped establish enough trust in me to keep seeing the new counselor. It's been one hell of a ride this past year, with one serious suicide attempt, living with daily panic attacks, a former group member stalking me, and a loss of self.....the worst of all. But there's one thing I would never change about this experience. God brought me into a relationship with Him like I've never known before. He has always been my God, but now I know Him as lover of my soul, completely faithful to me, Someone who LOVES to spend time with me.



**GOD SHINES THROUGH
OUR BROKEN PLACES
TO GIVE HIS *LIGHT*
TO EVERYONE AROUND.**

Shauna Letellier
incourage.me