

**STOP HIDING AND START LIVING!**

# **MISTAKEN IDENTITY**

**A GUIDE TO LETTING GO  
of a Past that's Holding You Back**

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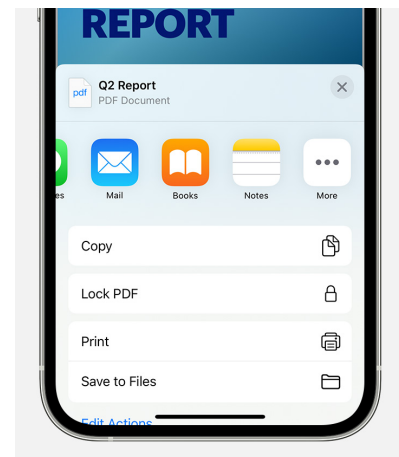
**DOUG DANE**

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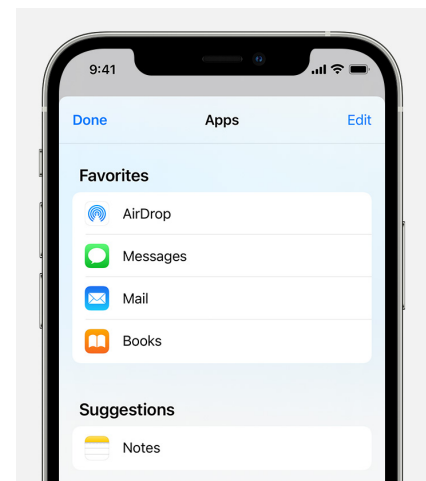


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This book is dedicated to my daughter. You came into my life at just the right time, and I realized I was worth more than I felt I was. You inspired me to be a better man, a better father, and a better person to help the world.

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# PROLOGUE

## Dark Past, Bright Future

■ *The Toronto Star, April 6, 2002*

Before I was born, I was set up for abuse. Born in October 1963 to a woman who had already abandoned three children to the child welfare system, I was placed for adoption into an abusive environment. Ironically, I was placed by the Children's Aid Society, a sanctioned agency, mandated to protect children. The placement could not have been more wrong.

In a time when our national news is riddled with examples of childhood abuse, when we should have the resources to provide guaranteed safe havens for children, my story must be told. It is not good enough to shake our heads, pour out a small amount of disgust, then move on to brushing our teeth before we turn out the light and forget.

Stories like mine need to be placed before our consciousness until we as a society take responsibility. Complacent, aging bureaucracies and understimulated consciences must be revitalized before more lives are lost to physical or emotional death, crime, and the perpetuated cycle of abuse. The myth that we do all we can to protect children needs to be seen for what it is.

I am stepping forward with fear, anger and hope in the belief that my story can make a difference. I believe that others will relate to it, that a collective voice can make a difference, and that there are good people within a decaying, top-heavy system who will muster the courage to do what they know they should.

In my case, I have learned through interviews with the Children's Aid Society of the Waterloo Region and through files received through the Freedom of Information Act that grave errors were made. I was placed poorly and monitored dismally. Later, when police investigations and child welfare intervention were necessary, both failed me.

So, I pose the question: In the many situations of abuse that were part of my life, who was responsible? My adoptive parents? The child welfare system? The police? Or was it just me?

That last question, unfortunately, is what the child internalizes. Like other victims of childhood abuse, I took on the blame and the shame. Therein lies the crux of my story—that the damage done to children's

psyches and souls, in a society as liberal and as enlightened as Canada's, is entirely preventable.

I was adopted as a six-month-old baby. The parents chosen for me were both alcoholics. Relatives knew. Friends knew. They had also been approved for a child eighteen months previously; he was adopted as a newborn. We became brothers.

From what I have gathered within the past year, it was the most rudimentary of home studies, yet it would have been simple to unearth that my parents were alcoholics and should never have been given the gift of one child, let alone two.

Instead, case notes indicate my father was "passive but quietly friendly and congenial" and that my mother "lacked the social graces of a very feminine woman." This man, whom the system turned into a father of two vulnerable boys, abused not only his own body but that of his equally abusive wife. This woman, whom the system turned into a mother, abused her body, her husband, and her two adopted sons.

Every day was a ritual of abuse and survival, permeated by the stink of stale beer and cigarettes amid the squalor of a living room turned into my mother's bedroom. My dad had to have a lock on his bedroom door because my mom, drunk and violent every day, would instigate fights with him.

The grind was the same: Get up, go to school, come home for lunch. We weren't allowed to stay in the safety of the school. No, filled with the dread of



what might lay ahead, we had to return to our mother at home. Then it was back to school and home again for more.

Often, my brother and I would be assigned bizarre, crazy-making chores. On one occasion, my mother made me paint the living room to cover up the beer and bloodstains on the walls from her fights with my father. Other times, I would have to roll cigarettes for her while she ran around the house yelling and screaming.

Child welfare records bring that life back hauntingly for me. When I was six years old, notes were made by social workers because my mother had “suffered a nervous collapse.” The child protection worker observed that “the home situation had deteriorated over the past few weeks. Mr. Dane had been drinking quite heavily and beating his wife. She had charged him with assault.” There are notes that foster care was needed, that “the worker saw Mr. Dane as being burdened with troubles of the world” and that “Mrs. Dane had a previous mental breakdown two years earlier.”

My brother and I were placed in a foster home on a farm for that summer and part of the fall. We liked the foster parents but missed our dog, Mitzi. Case notes indicate that there were six contacts during that time—two with our father, two with our mother, and two with both parents.

And then this: “Mrs. Dane returned home on Oct. 28, and the boys were returned. Mr. Dane had endeavored to remain away from his drinking, and Mrs. Dane

had endeavored to maintain some stability in trying to work out the marriage. The boys were involved in the Scout program and hockey and Sunday school. Case was closed Jan. 28, 1971.”

That was it, tidily worded and tucked away in the archives. Euphemisms work wonders! On paper.

In reality, as my brother and I advanced in age and collective misery, the daily rituals mutated into greater darkness.

After school, we'd wait (often outside the house because of Mom's drunkenness) for Dad to get home from work. My brother and I would stay out long enough for Mom to pass out drunk so that we'd be able to get in the house safely.

On worse nights or on weekends, we'd sit in Dad's locked room for safety from Mom when she came yelling and pounding on the door. If she did get ahold of Dad, the fights would be bloody.

Police visits became the norm for our neighborhood. Shame became my most constant companion.

**Two boys abandoned by the agency that had found a mother figure for them.**

At least once a week, I ran away, coming back after midnight when I knew she would be passed out. At times, I stayed overnight at a safe home of our neighbors. Our neighbors were our guardian angels.

When I was twelve, the Children's Aid Society was once again called in to assist—this time by my mother. Again, they did nothing substantial to intervene and protect my brother and me.

Case notes state that she wanted information on counseling and that she “sounded very agitated, possibly inebriated. The children are finding the situation quite upsetting.”

That's all. Two boys abandoned by the agency that had found a mother figure for them. Tokenism. A brief note to file. Case closed.

Finally one day, I was old enough and strong enough. When I came home from school, my dad was in the basement, and my mom was starting to beat on him. I put her in a headlock, carried her upstairs, and threw her out the side door. Locking her out, I called the police.

As they were putting her in the cruiser, she yelled to the police and the neighbors, “My son tried to murder me.” I was thirteen years old.

There was a final note on this from the child welfare agency: “Mrs. Dane's alcoholism is getting worse, and she left the home on July 8. Mr. Dane met with a worker and seemed to be looking for a way to keep her out of the home now that she had left. Mr. Dane [was] advised to seek legal counsel.”

Period. Case closed again.

With my mother gone, I could run the streets. Now a broken, sober man, my father suffered from the effects of alcoholism, bad memories of his World War

II experiences, and feelings of failure as a man and a father. And so it was that I fell into the clutches of a ring of sexual predators.

Four Kitchener-Waterloo men corralled twenty-three boys and persuaded us that our relationship was love. That's how desperate we were. That's how perverted they were. Two years of abuse culminated in my kidnapping when they took me to Halifax. I was fifteen.

I found my way home a week later. Soon afterwards, the police—two giants in uniform—presented me with what they knew and conducted a brief interview to gather more facts. Then they were gone. They didn't talk to my father or brother. They left me alone to carry the burden of shame.

In the copies of police reports I obtained, entire sections were whited out to protect the privacy of others involved. All I could see were a few typed notes of the interview with me, vague “footprints” left by the Children's Aid Society, the photographs that were seized, and the name of the stereo store and the Boy Scout troop the predators were involved with. (The four men were convicted on various sex charges in 1980 and received short sentences.)

More secrets, more shame!

I quit high school three times. In my heart, I knew I should stay in school, but I couldn't do it. Despite my high marks, I followed the path that had been laid out for me by the people who had abused me and by the authorities and professionals who had failed me.

**I could run the streets . . . I fell into the clutches of a ring of sexual predators.**

The next fifteen years were the toughest. I tried almost every drug possible and broke free only because the altered state inflamed my feelings of inadequacy and shame. I was fortunate enough to experience the pain and paranoia caused by doing drugs and, thus, saved from disappearing into the sinkhole that childhood trauma often leads to. Searching for validation through success, I worked at a number of jobs, failed at businesses, went bankrupt, and eventually landed on my feet. I married twice and divorced twice. The feelings of being unaccepted and unsure of myself ate away at me. Little, dark, nasty, blathering voices always danced at the back of my consciousness.

Both my parents are gone now. I have survived the loss of a mother four times: my birth mother's abandonment, the eviction of my adoptive mother, my adoptive mother's death from cancer two years ago, and my birth mother's unwillingness to acknowledge me as her own now.

In therapy, I have worked on dealing with my losses and the aftershock of childhood abuse. Some people who have made a difference in my life—neighbors who cared, one cop who wanted to protect abused kids, a few teachers who made an impact, and two wives and

their families who were good people—were like delicate lilies along that path to healing.

Now I am successful in business and financially secure. I have found four natural siblings and my birth mother. And I am at long last beginning to see purpose in my life and to live in peace. Someone somewhere once astutely said, “The average person tiptoes through life, hoping to make it safely to death.” Something inside me—soul, self, truth, God, call it what you will—has sometimes nudged and often propelled me along the right path.

I am in the awesome process of finding the love and the beauty in conscious living. The furtherance of my dream is that I may encourage others to tell their stories and begin to live big. I see it happening now as I speak to high school students and as I take steps to write a book, my story.

Our child welfare system in this amazing nation of Canada is out of sync with the needs of today’s society. Part of my dream is to see the agencies involved, from child welfare to the courts to police services, revamped in favor of the protection of youngsters. To do this, the system must be funded properly and managed by creative, brilliant, and daring people, who will walk in where angels truly have not been let loose.

It is not facile to say that our children are our future; it is unequivocally true. Once the front end of the machine, the child welfare system, is rebalanced

and working smoothly and creatively, the judicial and police systems will hum along with it.

We need to offer people a safe haven where they can come forward and tell their stories and reveal the secrets that could haunt them until they die. These dark, ugly stories hold us back, leaving us suffering through a life with little self-confidence and causing us to hide in the shadows of our true selves.

We must all come to terms with our stories—whatever they are—and heal. That's a given in life. What is not a given is the assistance of nurturing and protective people along the way.

# INTRODUCTION

**I**N THE SUMMER of 1999, at the age of thirty-five, I was confronted with the undeniable truth that my life wasn't working. My marriage was crumbling. I was headed for divorce for the second time in four years. During those hot summer months, I realized something that had been true for nearly all my life. I was stuck. I was forced to confront a reality I'd been ignoring for as long as I could remember. The pain of being abandoned and abused as a helpless child had left me with deep wounds of guilt and shame.

As a result, I'd lived like a rat trapped in a maze, anxious, desperate, and making the same wrong turns over and over again in a futile search for freedom.

As a younger person, I had tried to cover up the problem with drugs. Thankfully, I quickly realized that the escape they provided only made matters worse. Then I tried relationships. Obviously, that hadn't worked either.



I knew the problem wasn't a lack of intelligence. I was smart enough to do well in business. What I lacked was self-knowledge. I needed someone to help me quit making the same mistakes over and over. So, I went looking for help, real help, not just a Band-Aid to make me feel better. I wanted a permanent solution that would stick. That landed me in the office of a professional counselor named Ellyn. She was a wise woman who was trained to see what I didn't see. What I didn't see, but I was ready to see, was why I was making so many mistakes in my life and that I couldn't seem to get it right.

As I sat in the small waiting room adjacent to her home office, I was nervous but felt a sense of peace. Her home was a century-old stone house set among trees. I'd felt a warm and welcoming feeling even while walking up the sidewalk.

After a few minutes, the office door opened, and I was greeted by a short, round, gray-haired woman, who resembled a kindly aunt or grandmother. I felt safe and trusting.

We sat down, and she began with the usual family history and background questions that therapists ask. I thought, "Here we go again." Same old questions, same old process, and probably the same old result. I challenged her expertise with a question about relationships, trying to cut to the chase. At that Ellyn stood up, walked over, and looked me square in the eyes. She said, "You don't know anything about relationships,

and I do, which is why you're here. If you want my help, you better listen.”

**Telling your story does not  
normalize the harm done to you.  
It normalizes *you*.**

I respected her for knowing what I was looking for. Within a few sessions, she got beyond my present issue—the divorce—and uncovered the story I had blocked out for too many years. Ellyn's gift was to take me backwards in time to my youth to confront a violent, abusive childhood. My story from the prologue of this book was published in a national newspaper and told on TV and in other books. Many people wonder why I chose to tell a story that was so horrible to endure. The reason is simple. When Ellyn asked me what I needed to do to let go of the terrible weight of guilt and shame, I blurted out, “I want to write my story and go public with it.”

So I did.

Talking works. Telling your story does not normalize the harm done to you. It normalizes *you*. After my story was published, I realized I wasn't alone. Many, many others had suffered a similar fate. I came to understand that there wasn't anything wrong with me after all. Wrong had *happened* to me. The guilt and shame I felt existed only because of what I thought about me.

Soon after going public, I began to receive invitations for speaking appearances. People approached me, wanting to know how I was able to move from abuse to freedom. “How did you do it?” they asked. “What’s the secret?” I knew what I had done to get unstuck, but I couldn’t tell others how to do it. I didn’t want anyone to suffer as I had or for as long as I had. I needed to find a way to communicate my road to freedom, not just the details of my abuse.

Sometime later, my then girlfriend told me she was pregnant and that I was going to be a father. We had started out as friends after my second marriage ended, and we hadn’t been dating long. I was still struggling with the remnants of my past at a deep, subconscious level. I was still triggered by old wounds that would set me back. The thought of becoming a father added urgency to my quest for healing.

Ellyn once explained to me that I needed to become a parent to “that little boy” who had suffered all those years ago. In other words, I must show myself some love and tenderness. She called it “unconditional positive regard.” She said that all the pain, suffering, and mistakes weren’t my fault, and they weren’t his fault. “What does that little boy need to hear from you?” Ellyn asked. “What do you want him to know based on your years of experience and growth?”

That conversation became a catalyst for the idea of self-parenting. If telling my story had been the

first giant step toward my freedom, parenting myself became another.

The third came in May 2014 through my mentor, from whom I learned about the power of mindset and self-image. Through that, I have developed a strong understanding of mindset and how it works for overcoming the shame and trauma of childhood abuse and self-loathing.

Let me be clear about something right up front. I don't have any fancy degrees behind my name. I didn't finish high school. I tried it three times, but I kept quitting and never got past grade ten. I spent years in therapy and saw no change in my life. Same process, same mistakes, same results. But then I figured it out. Nobody can question my process because it worked, and if it can work for me, it can work for you.

The process has enabled me to organize my thinking about what I did and how I did it in a way others can follow to end their struggles, to let go of their own stories.

Getting unstuck and healing is simple! I made it hard, but I discovered why, and I want to show you how simple it can be.

Most people are stuck in an emotional prison, but it's a case of mistaken identity. The real villain is their upbringing and the system that keeps them stuck. The struggle becomes their identity.

Too many people struggle with their past, and they're stuck, which leaves them feeling frustrated and

anxious. It impacts their mental well-being and causes them problems at home and at work. They continue to struggle, and worse, they raise children who struggle.

**What is a mistaken identity? Your mistaken identity is how you see yourself and the strong perception you have of yourself, which was drilled into you through your conditioning and your upbringing. You see yourself a certain way; you're mistaken about your potential, your qualities, and your gifts. You're convinced you're not worthy of more. You may have low self-esteem. You may be lacking self-confidence in parts of your life and see yourself as unworthy. That's a mistake.**

If that sounds familiar, this book is for you. It's a simple pathway to freedom from your emotional prison so you can write a new, empowering story for yourself and live a fulfilling life. This book is a formula for getting unstuck fast.

This book is written as a handbook. Each chapter is only a few pages and is very direct. I don't want you to waste your time like I did. I want to help you get right to the point; I want you to take action and begin experiencing freedom right now.

## **HOW TO USE THIS BOOK**

Each chapter presents a pivotal life lesson, along with changes you can make for incorporating that lesson into your life.

Let me repeat, this is simple. I made it hard. But you don't have to make the same mistake. Learn from my mistakes and follow my instructions. You'll be glad you did.

At the end of each chapter, you will reflect on insights and what you learned from the chapter. Then you will jot down the key points and complete a simple action step. There is a piece of Scripture that I'd like you to meditate on for a few minutes to see if you can connect the lesson to what's on God's mind about you. Even if you don't believe in God, consider what His word says about you.

This simple process, which you can complete in just a few minutes each day, will move you into action. It is your escape plan from the emotional prison you're stuck in.

Don't let this be another "*shelf-help*" book. Take the advice given here. It really works. But you must work too. That's vital. Merely reading this book isn't enough. You need to experience it. After all, you didn't read a book to be taught love. You *experienced* love. And you must experience the release that comes from this process also.

So, make sure to do the exercises. Take action. That's where the magic happens. When you experience the concepts in this book, something happens inside your brain and nervous system, and your mind begins to change. This is how transformation takes place.

Now let me give you the advice Ellyn gave me over twenty years ago. You are not an expert in getting unstuck. I presume if you're reading this, your way is not working. This way does work. So please, commit to this journey for the next thirty days. Read the book daily. Reread it several times. Drill these truths into your mind. Do the exercises. You've wasted enough time and money on solutions that don't work. Deep down, you're hoping this is the answer.

### **IT IS. LET'S GET STARTED.**

*If you want to learn from me directly and follow me through this book, go to my website at [www.dougane.com](http://www.dougane.com), and I will spend the next month with you as you read.*

# C H A P T E R

## 0 1

# Stop Judging

*Judging a person does not define who they are. It defines who you are.*

—Unknown

**W**HEN YOU STOP judging others, you'll stop judging yourself.

When we are born, we are authentic and filled with love, without judgment. But very early on, we learn to judge. It starts small, and it grows. It grew in you, and it grew in the ones around you who raised you and taught you.

We watched our parents judge people. They criticized the neighbors. They criticized their friends, talking behind people's backs. They criticized each



other. And when they raised us, they criticized us. They didn't mean to, but they did.

They told us what was right and wrong and defined what was good and bad. If we got it right, we got praise, love, validation, and approval. But if we got it wrong, then we were judged, criticized, punished, yelled at, ignored, and in my case, hit.

Self-doubt grew within us and we began to judge ourselves. Then we started judging others. We punished ourselves when we didn't measure up, and we looked for validation from others to confirm we were doing things right.

This created our fear of criticism, and we began to worry about what others thought about us. We don't like what we think of ourselves, and we're afraid of what other people think of us. And most of us aren't even aware of it. This fear is further fueled by social media, politics, through fashion and style, and through television and magazines. It's everywhere!

We learned to cover up how we felt or what we thought because we didn't want to be judged. We learned to cover up who we really were, and we fell into line. Then we started to dislike ourselves, maybe even hate ourselves, and we didn't want anyone to know what we thought of ourselves. What would they think of us if they really knew what we were thinking and feeling?

## **JUDGMENT IS A PANDEMIC, AND IT'S SPREADING.**

As an adult and a parent, I see how the cycle is continuing. Many adults are struggling with judgment and the fear of criticism, and they are raising children who are struggling. The parents are struggling to help their struggling children, and they don't know what to do!

### **Letting go of your past and how you view it is the cure.**

I really struggled and got stuck a lot! I judged myself. Who wouldn't? I can imagine how you must feel about yourself. You will see stories throughout this book that you may relate to. Don't judge yourself if you do.

Judgment and fear of criticism causes you to worry. When you worry, it creates anxiety, which leads to depression and maybe worse. Anxiety and depression seem to be the new norm. It seems no one knows what to do. Pills and counseling have become the go-to remedies, but they aren't the cure. Mental health awareness is a popular narrative these days, but it just brings attention to the problem, not the cure. We are treating symptoms, not the cause. Judgment is the cause! Letting go of your past and how you view it is the cure. Learning to

like yourself, forgiving yourself, and ridding yourself of worrying about what others think is the cure!

If you realize why you were judged, and you understand why you judge yourself, you can let it go and be free. I'll explain this as we go through this book together.

As a parent, I realized it's not my job to pass along my rules, values, and beliefs that set me up to judge. I'm supposed to rid myself of judgment, so I don't pass it along to my daughter or others in my life. We all run the risk of judging our children and spreading the disease. I still judge other people sometimes. But the difference now is that I catch myself doing it. And when I do catch myself, I stop it, and I remind myself to look for the good in others. For me to see the good in someone else, I must see good in me.

I discovered a cure for self-judgment and fear of criticism. It's a three-step process. The first step is to stop judging others. The second naturally follows: when you stop judging others, you stop judging yourself (or you start judging yourself less), and you feel better about yourself; you become lighter. Third is you become immune to other people's judgment of you. When I became more immune to judgment, the *disease* began to ease. When I started treating people better, I started treating myself better. That made me feel free.

It's that simple. Make these steps a habit, and when you do, you'll find that you judge yourself less.

Be careful what you send out because it will come back and hit you in the back of your head. It's called

the boomerang effect. As I started to direct more love and acceptance towards others, more love and acceptance came back to me.

When we judge others, it's a reflection of how we feel about ourselves. I discovered there is good in me! The judgments I've made over the years created a *disease* in me that had impacted so many areas of my life. I have now forgiven myself, and I've forgiven those who have hurt me out of their own hurt, judgment, and fear.

**When you stop judging others, you  
stop judging yourself.**

I was surprised how simple it was and how quickly things changed for me.

My mission is to help rid others of judgment. If I can get adults to stop judging themselves and others, then they can be freer, and the people they judge will be freer. Then they can free their children from judgment, and they can raise them to be healthier and happier. Their children can grow up to be adults who are healthy and happy and raise children who are also healthy and happy. I figure it'll only take one or two generations to help to reduce enough judgment to create a better world.

**■ MEDITATION ■**

*Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

Matthew 7:1-2 NIV

**■ INSIGHTS ■**

What did you learn from this chapter?

1.

2.

3.

## ■ ACTION ■

Your first step is to stop judging.

- Make a list of things you judge yourself for.
- Pick one thing from your list; decide you're going to practice letting go of it each day.
- Make a list of the people in your life whom you judge. Pick one person and decide that you are no longer going to judge them, and practice, starting today.

*As you practice this first step, pay attention to what you say and think to yourself about others and correct yourself. Look for the good in people. Treat others the way you want to be treated.*