

THE SYMBOLISM ON THE COVER OF ALL THE SCARY LITTLE GODS

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of FlyingFreeNow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 259 of the Flying Free Podcast. I am recording this at the end of November 2023, and this episode won't air until January 20th, 2024. This is normal for me. I like to record a couple of months in advance so that if something goes wrong in life, I have some margin to take care of whatever that might be and still be able to continue to publish this podcast. I admit it: I was one of those kids in school who would get my assignment done a week in advance, and sometimes it really paid off.

I remember my freshman year in college I had a composition class and I turned my first college paper in a week in advance — pretty proud of myself. My professor marked it all up and told me to go back and rewrite it. It wasn't organized correctly. It wasn't written well. So I scrambled and rewrote the entire thing and still turned it in a couple of days early. Once again, she marked it all up and said I was closer, but that I still didn't get it. "Go back and rewrite it again."

This time as I read her notes, all the light bulbs went on, and I discovered the pattern she was trying to teach me. And I was like, "Is this a thing? Like, is this how you write papers? I never knew that! Could I actually apply this formula to any paper or essay?" And she said that yes, indeed, that was the pattern. And so I went back and I rewrote the paper a third time, I turned it in in the nick of time, and I got an "A" on it. And I got "A's" on almost every paper after that because I applied what she taught me to every other class and essay and piece of writing that I ever did after that.

So, see? It pays to work ahead. But here's the problem with working ahead. Things change, and it's very possible that what is true today may not be true by the time this episode is published. So for example, at the time of this recording, I'm planning the release date of my new book to be February 20th. But all of that depends on when the book cover and the internal formatting and the final proofreading is completed.

Now, I'm told it's all going to be done soon, but what if the person doing the formatting gets sick and it's postponed? What if the proofreader takes longer to do her job than she had anticipated? What if something I can't even imagine happens? Well, then this episode might not be totally accurate. So if that's the case, I will provide any corrections in the show notes. But otherwise, this is going to be one of three episodes I plan to

record where I'm talking about or giving you information about my new book.

Now, by this time, the title and the cover has been revealed, and I want to talk about that first in this episode because the cover and the title, actually, both have a lot of symbolism in them, and I really wanted the cover and the title to tell the entire story in one piece of art. So I hired the same professional designer who did the cover of my first book, "Is It Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage." Her name is Melinda Martin. Her company is martinpublishingservices.com. She is a delight to work with and she has the ability to capture what I've got in my head into the artwork of the cover.

So here's what I wanted: I wanted the cover to capture this feeling of the religious abuse... I was thinking of if you took a cross between Hunchback of Notre Dame and Alice in Wonderland. So you've got this religious abuse that you see in Hunchback of Notre Dame and the icons and the church and the gothic font and everything, and then you've got this crazy, upside-down feeling of wandering through a maze in Alice in Wonderland. Because to me, I feel like that combination perfectly captures how emotional and spiritual abuse impacts our minds and bodies. So the font that we found for the book cover has that gothic, cathedral kind of look to it, and she made it pop out in a three-dimensional look. It just jumps out at you on the page: "All the Scary Little Gods."

By the way, let's just talk about the title for a second, because as I was considering what to call my book, I came up with several ideas, and most of them were absolutely ridiculous, but I'll just throw out a few of them that were probably my better ideas, but they still weren't all that great. One was called "Divorcing God," one was called "My Rude, Freaked, Melancholy, Bossy, Rosie Life," one was called "Flying Free," one idea was "Trading Gods," one idea was "Flying Lessons"... Which, actually, I think my next book is going to be called "Flying Lessons" because I have an idea for that and I think that title would actually be a really good title for my next book.

But anyway, I'm not going to mention all the other ones because none of them really fit. None of them really encapsulated what the book was actually about. Like, "Divorcing God" — it's not really about divorcing God. I mean, there's an element of that to it, but it's actually the opposite. It's actually about finding God, but I didn't really want to use that title either.

So anyways, when I went back to the drawing board to ask myself what the book was really about, I realized it's about a lot of scary little gods that I was programmed to worship that honestly kept me distracted from the Creator God and that Love who was within me all along.

So in the introduction of part one, I talk about this when I write this: "For me, the journey has been about discovering that empathetic witness in the tangled maze of religious programming that taught me how to worship and fawn after scary little gods. Gods that included authority figures, pet religious beliefs, my own confused and conflicted shadow parts" (which you get to meet in the book) "and a powerless, petty god made in the image of all the abusers I had ever known. A god who gaslighted, manipulated, and terrified humans. Why? For his glory and pleasure."

So the title is also a play on a childhood lullaby that has a phrase in it that says this: "All the pretty little ponies." Kind of a creepy little tune there too. So I had a recurring nightmare where my toy horse that I loved to ride as a child, we kept him in our basement, but I loved riding him. And so in this dream, he would turn into a monster and chase me upstairs. And so I decided to use this symbolism to represent that constant feeling that I was trying to escape from things that looked safe on the outside and maybe even represented love, but then they would transform into these scary little monsters if I looked more closely. So they were like little fraudulent things that acted like they were good, and they were actually really, really bad.

I wanted to capture what it felt like to be a small, vulnerable child, making sense of the world with all these things spinning around. Lullabies and monsters and dollies and swinging and music and truth and lies and God, the devil, heaven, hell, good, bad, and so on. The first part of my book is told from that little girl's perspective as she was indoctrinated with a lot of religious ideas that, honestly, by today's Christian standards, and most of Christendom, are pretty far out there. And I just leave it up to the reader to draw your own experienced adult conclusions about what was actually happening. The little girl telling you the story didn't know what was real and what wasn't, but as a reader, we can see it.

I love the colors Melinda picked for the cover. I wanted it to be a lot of contrast, okay? So like darkness and light, innocence and death. I wanted some flames at the bottom to represent the idea of hell or death trying to consume this little girl. And she is innocently swinging, which is another activity that I loved to do as a child because it made me feel like I was flying, which is another recurring dream I still have to this day. Honestly, my favorite thing to do in my dreams when I am lucid dreaming is to fly. As soon as I realize, "Hey, I'm having a dream," I'm like, "I can fly!" and so I do.

So anyway, we've got some flames at the bottom of the book cover, and the colors of these flames are gorgeous. They perfectly contrast with the deep purples of the rest of the image. And these flames that kind of look like they're almost cradling her, and I feel like that represents the idea of this death or this hate that's always there threatening

that child from the time she's born. And the theme of death is seen throughout the book. Not necessarily physical death, although there is some of that in there, but figuratively dying, since that is something I was taught from a very early age — that if we are good girls, if we are godly, we will die to our own rights and wishes and desires in order to live for Christ. In other words, you couldn't honor God and at the same time live to fulfill your own selfish dreams.

That way of thinking is such a murder of the personhood of a human being made in the image of a very creative and life-giving God. It's a teaching that I believe is the exact polar opposite of the heart of God. It's a teaching of death and destruction. That's from the adversary, not from our Creator God.

But if you look at the little girl on the cover, she's actually inside of this three-dimensional, heart-shaped bubble that glows with light and beats with life. And inside that bubble she's swinging, innocently swinging, and there's a dove that represents the Spirit of God. The idea is that she is safely held no matter how many lies are surrounding her, no matter how much death or whatever hatred rages around her — she is safely held always. She doesn't necessarily know that, but that is what's happening throughout her life.

When I first asked the people who follow me on my Flying Free Facebook page if they would give me their input on the idea of calling it “All the Scary Little Gods,” many women said the title was too scary. It was too negative and they would be nervous to read it. Not everyone, but there was a handful of people that felt like that.

I was actually tempted to abandon that title because of that, but then I thought about what I actually teach on a regular basis: that the only way through to healing is to actually face our monsters, to face our shame, to face the things that are threatening to shut us down, to move towards the things that we are afraid of inside of our own selves. Because when we run away in fear and shame, the monsters just get bigger and scarier and more powerful. And when we turn around and face them and look them in the eye, that actually removes their power and they shrivel up into these little shmeglies who slink away.

My book does not leave the reader feeling shame and fear, though. It's going to leave you feeling hope and love because it doesn't just talk about how you can get to that safe place like a self-help book would. It actually is going to show you a path forward by showing you or demonstrating how one little girl searched for and finally found that path. Now, does that path or does her path have to be your path? No. But it shows you a path, one potential path. And I promise God has your path prepared for you when

you are ready to embark on it. He doesn't ever force us, but He's always, always waiting. The invitation is always out there — He's waiting for us to be ready.

Now, again, I wanted the book cover to be dark. I even thought it was going to be black and have a black-and-white kind of light and dark contrast. But Melinda, she used this incredibly beautiful dark purple color, and I am so glad she did. I looked up the meaning of purple and it represents a lot of amazing things, but one of the things that represents is spirituality, which is really what this book is all about. Also, purple is a combination of the colors red and blue. Red is a powerful, energetic color, and blue is a calming, peaceful, leader type of color. And so purple is a balance of those two things. And also it's the color of royalty, dignity, and peace. It perfectly represents the self-leadership of the human creation of God as well as how that creation reflects the balanced character of God.

So in contrast to that purple, which is dark, you also have the energy and heat of this uncontrollable, frantic, fearful, frenetic fire below. And I wanted to show how our circumstances may be riddled with this kind of destructive energy, but we can still be in control of our own hearts as we rest in that heart of love. That fear and shame becomes just another source of warmth for our life to transform and thrive in. In other words, God takes that and He turns it into something that's actually transformative.

And then finally, if you look closely, there is an adorable little caterpillar crawling on the branch in the fire. You can kind of see its silhouette against the fire. And then up above in the top corner of the book, you see a butterfly flying free. And I wanted to include that imagery since it's so much a part of what I teach and the analogy that I've used for several years in my writings that draws so many comparisons between emotional and spiritual abuse survivors and the metamorphosis process of the caterpillar to the butterfly.

So there you have it — a description of the cover and the rationale behind the title of my memoir. At the time of this recording, like I said, if all goes well, it will be released on February 20th, 2024, so in a little bit over a month, but by the time you're listening to this, you should be able to pre-order it on Amazon. And if that's the case, you can either do a search on Amazon to find it, but I will also include a direct link in the show notes.

I asked my daughter who loves to read books, and she's the kind of person who will go to Barnes and Noble and she'll buy a book based on its cover. If a cover is compelling and looks like, "Oh, this looks like it'd be really exciting to read," she'll buy the book. She looked at this cover and she said, "Oh my word, mom. If I saw this book on a shelf, I would totally buy it." So there you go.

Hey, beautiful butterfly. Thank you so much for listening. If you liked this episode, be sure to subscribe, and then consider leaving a rating and review so others can find us. To connect with me and get a free chapter of my book, head over to flyingfreenow.com, and until next time, fly free.