

The Shame Vault is a self-help book for people trying to recover from past abuse, destructive lifestyles, and the unavoidable traumas we often receive in life. This book includes creative exercises to complete in every chapter, to help readers along their own paths to recovery.

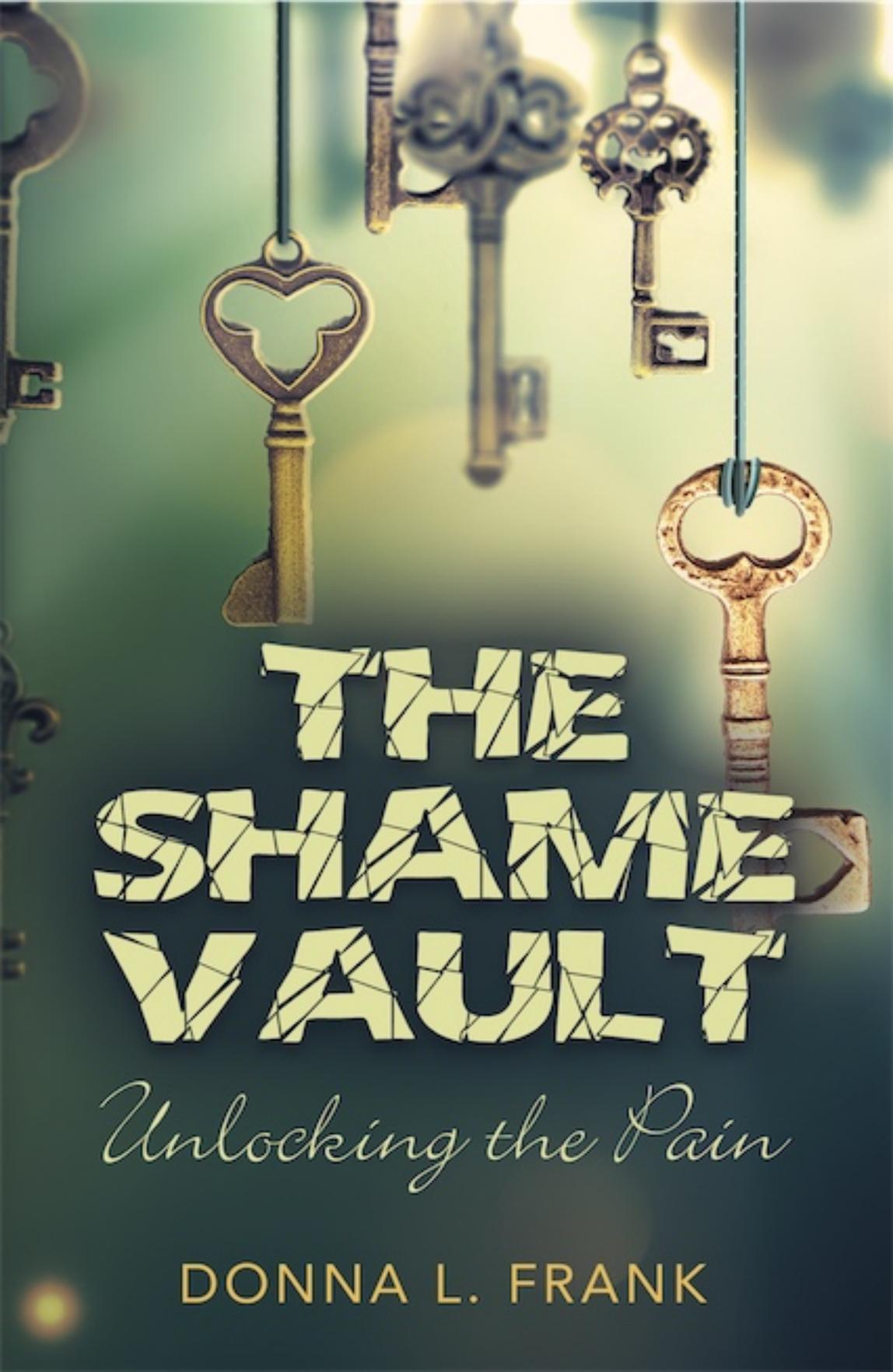
The Shame Vault:

Unlocking the Pain

by Donna L. Frank

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**THE
SHAMME
VAULT**

Unlocking the Pain

DONNA L. FRANK

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Chapter One

The Committee—Separating the Chaos

*Sometimes I've believed as many as six
impossible things before breakfast.
Lewis Carroll – Alice in Wonderland*

I have a collection of opinions that use my mind as a meeting space to throw ideas around. Each of the opinions has a distinctive voice, but I refrain from telling people that I hear voices. I think you'll find that, even if you do hear voices, it's usually best to keep that to yourself. (Professionals tend to use that sort of information against you.) I have named the collection of opinions in my head "the Committee." One of the reasons I've done that is to help me separate their thoughts from my thoughts. If I'm not careful, I will start listening to the Committee and give it the same attention that I would a sane, logical thought that originated in my head. The Committee is very seldom sane, but they pitch their ideas in very logical language. If I'm not careful, it's easy to buy into their lies.

I have to tell you, the Committee is a brutal bunch. They are opinionated, arrogant, fearful, and loud. If not kept in check, the Committee will try to take over. It's a mutiny of the mind, and it's a bloody battle.

For a long time I didn't know that the Committee was a separate entity from me. That missing piece of information kept me in chaos for years. I was under the false assumption that everything that ran through my head was an idea or thought that I had come up with on my own. That particular lie created more shame and confusion than I could manage. This is an example of a typical Committee Meeting:

Imagine standing on a street corner in New York City: people crowded around you, conversations of various volumes and dialects, and somebody standing too close that smells a little like feet and salami. Are you there? Now add to that snippets of music: songs you don't like, songs that take you to uncomfortable memories or shameful places. It's never entire songs, just small pieces. Still with me? Okay, now add a low-level undercurrent of a radio. It's not ever on one station; it's more like somebody randomly turning the dial through all the frequencies. Oh, and sometimes there's the sound of rushing water: not a peaceful stream or a pleasant memory, more like a torrent that may sweep over you at any moment. That is the backdrop of a typical Committee meeting. And then the meeting begins.

Control: All right everybody. Settle down, take your seats, and let's bring this meeting to order. Fear, you sit over there by Bully and move Co-dependent over beside Flesh. Right now, everybody; let's move.

Bully: Who died and made you boss?

Co-dependent: No need to fight, you two, let's just get along, take turns, and it'll be fine. I wanted to sit beside Flesh anyway. It's okay, really.

Judgment: Whatever. You guys are a complete mess. It's surprising we ever get anything accomplished here.

Control: Enough already. Let's get down to business. Who's got something to put on the table?

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Memory: I do. I was chatting with Co-dependent the other day and we were thinking we should maybe give Ex-boyfriend a call.

Flesh: I love that idea! He hasn't been around in ages. Wait, are we talking about Ex number 3 or Ex number 2?

Co-dependent: Number 2. Ex number 3 still won't return our calls. But I saw number 2 at the drive-thru yesterday; at least I think it was him. I saw a car that was almost the same color as the one he had when we first met. Okay, I don't know for sure that it was him, but it reminded me of him and made me think of all the great times we had together.

Judgment: You can't be serious. That one was a full-blooded loser with a capital L. Isn't he the one that dumped us for that skinny girl at the deli counter? Not that anyone would blame him for that. I mean, look at us; are we gaining weight again?

Memory: Yep, that's the one, Judgment. And, he told us we were too dumb to make cereal and that we would end up single and alone forever. Do you remember that, Co-dependent?

Co-dependent: He may have said that one time, but he didn't mean it.

Memory: One time, my eye! He said the cereal thing that Saturday morning in the kitchen right in front of Mom. We were wearing that blue sundress with the tiny, red flowers and Mom spilled her coffee on our sunglasses. Oh, and the "single forever" comment was like a theme song. That's what he used to get us back that time we caught him with the girl from work, remember?

Judgment: Girl from work? Did he even have a job?

Co-dependent: Of course he did. He worked at the place where they rebuild pallets.

Judgment: That was a temp job he had for two weeks. Two weeks out of a six-month relationship does not a job make. He was unemployed; he was a bum, just like Dad.

Bully: You leave our father out of this, Judgment. You hear me? I'll come across this table right now and give you a tune up you arrogant piece of —

Flesh: Enough already! Bully, sit down. Judgment, shut up. Co-dependent, call the man. I am ready for some excitement.

Sound vaguely familiar? Granted, not every meeting has an identical itinerary, but the agenda never changes. The purpose of the Committee is to recreate and keep alive old memories and past hurts. In its spare time, it finds ways to make you question every decision you've ever made, replay every conversation you've ever had, and challenge every idea that you dare to dream. It will offer critical judgments about co-workers, friends, and people you see in traffic. The sole aim of the Committee is to keep you stuck in old junk and to dissuade you from attempting anything new.

Here's another example:

Dreamer: I saw an ad in the paper about an art class. I was thinking about checking it out.

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Judgment: That's for people who have talent. That's not us.

Fear: I think Judgment is right. And, it probably costs money and we should be watching our budget. Money doesn't grow on trees, you know. We should probably wait and think about it a while.

Dreamer: But the class starts next week. If we don't sign up now there might not be another chance.

Fear: Memory, don't you have something to add?

Memory: Well, now that you mention it. Remember when we wanted to take that Spanish class a few years ago? That didn't work out well at all. That boy in class made fun of us and we cried all the way home. I think this is a mistake.

Dreamer: Memory, that was in ninth grade. And I cried on the way home because Fear convinced me that Dad was going to hit me for failing the test. Dad didn't hit me and I really did pass the course.

Memory: That's not how I remember it.

Fear: Better to leave sleeping dogs lie, Dreamer. I don't think we want to go down that road again.

Control: Okay, enough chatter. Let's take a vote. All those in favor of Dreamer starting something else she will probably fail, say "Aye." (Silence.) Sorry Dreamer, you're out-voted. Maybe next time.

Donna L. Frank

*Men are not prisoners of fate, but only
prisoners of their own minds.
-Franklin D. Roosevelt*

I got a new computer recently and it's really cool. It's much nicer than my old one, but it's frustrating because I have to learn a lot of new skills to make it work. The buttons are in different places and the command keys are different. It makes working on it a little slower because I'm still trying to figure it all out. But, once I learn the new system, I know I'll be much happier. The reason I mention this is because firing the Committee is a little like getting a new computer: it's confusing at first, but much better in the long run.

Regaining control of your mind can feel like a hostile takeover. Most of the members that sit on the Committee have been there for years, and they're not going to leave without a fight. Some of the characters may be worth keeping, but they will need to be re-trained to do a better job. For example, Dreamer is probably somebody you would want on your new staff, but she will have to undergo extensive rehabilitation. After sitting on the Committee with Fear and Judgment for so long, her ability to dream has atrophied. Even though she has a few new ideas, they are much too small for the new life you're going to have. She is going to have to learn to use her voice and her imagination in ways she's never imagined.

An important part of restructuring any organization is to know what you're starting with. A careful inventory of the Committee members will give you an idea of whether you have some members that can be salvaged or if it's better to clean house and start fresh. Since the Committee is going to be strongly against this idea, you may have to sneak up on it.

Over the next few days I want you to think about what's going through your mind and I want you to assign a name to each voice. It may be Fear, Insecurity, Hatred, or Addiction. It may also, if you listen closely, be very familiar. Its name may be Mom, Dad, Big Sister or Second Grade Teacher. Anyone who has played a role in your life may have been granted a seat on the Committee. Now is the time to re-evaluate whether or not they still deserve to have a voice.

For years I believed that I was a bad person because I had bad thoughts. The Committee's voice was so loud and so constant that I believed their conversations were really my thoughts. I was in my thirties before I learned that I didn't have to be a victim to every whim of the Committee. That's a long time to live in torment, particularly when it's unnecessary. I had to develop new habits in my thinking. I had to re-train my brain. Please don't misunderstand me; I have not yet arrived. This continues to be a work in progress, but there is definitely progress. The Committee has yet to be entirely evicted from my mind, but the influence they hold over me has been minimized.

One of the ways that I have gained ground against the Committee has been to recognize that I can't argue my way out of bad thoughts. I used to try to fight the Committee with logic, but that didn't work. The Committee doesn't fight fair and they don't play by the rules. Logic only works if you're dealing with someone who wants to find a solution. The Committee doesn't want solutions; it only wants to fight.

I used to drink. A lot. And when I drank, the Committee had full reign over not only my thoughts, but my words and actions as well. It was horrendous. The Committee loves a good fight and it really doesn't care how I fare in the fight. The Committee

is not on our side; it is firmly on the side of chaos. The Committee will try to convince you that you really could take that big guy in a fight, that you really are okay to drive after drinking eight margaritas, and that the whole room really does want to know what you think about your best friend's new girl. . The Committee feeds on mayhem and confusion, and it takes a dedicated effort to change its diet.

Once you've gained some authority over your own Committee, it's fairly easy to determine who else is struggling with a Committee of their own. They are the people who, for no apparent reason, suddenly become depressed or hostile. This often occurs when there has been no change in circumstances, conversation, or conditions; they just take a dive into the deep-end of brokenness. Most times, this sudden change can be attributed to a spontaneous Committee Meeting. Either Memory pulls something from the archives to torment them or Judgment voices a lie about someone around them. It may be Shame reminding them of how entirely unworthy they are, or Bitterness recalling some offense from the past. The Committee refuses to let any of us enjoy the present moment. It only wants to draw us back into the pain of our past.

In order to gain victory over the Committee we have to arm ourselves with truth. I was not able to make any serious headway against destructive thinking until I started fighting those thoughts with the truth about how God sees me. I couldn't fight thoughts with thoughts; I had to fight them with truth. I had been reading the Bible for a while, but I didn't know that I could use it as a weapon. I knew that the "sword of the Spirit" represented God's word, but I didn't know that it could have an impact on my life. I had to start using scriptures as ammunition

to overpower the lies of the Committee. I had to start believing that God's word had the power to save me.

Memorization does not come easy to me. I have read the Bible, cover to cover, multiple times, but I still couldn't tell you where to find the 10 commandments. I could locate them, if I had to, but that's just not information that I keep stored in my mind. What I have learned to do is memorize the verses that allow me to fight the enemy. I can't give you a scripture reference for it, but I know that I am more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus. I know that I am the head and not the tail, above always and never beneath. I know that I have been given authority to tread on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and that nothing will by any means hurt me. I know that I am accepted in the beloved. I know that old things have passed away and all things have become new. I know that if I confess my sins, God is faithful and just to forgive me and to cleanse me of all unrighteousness. I know that God is love, and that He loves me.

Whatever your particular brand of torment is, God has provided the words you need to fight back. The Bible tells us that life and death is in the power of the tongue. What are you speaking over yourself?

If you are letting the Committee determine what you spend your time thinking about, I guarantee that you will continue to live in torment. You have been given authority, but you have to pick it up and use it. There are three things that can happen with authority: it can be used, it can be abused, or it can be laid down. If you choose to lay it down, someone else will be sure to pick it up, and it will likely end badly for you.

Donna L. Frank

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

-Helen Keller

So, how do we beat the Committee? With discipline and self-control. We re-train ourselves with God's word. When the Committee offers a negative thought, we fight it with the truth we have stored inside of us. The Committee cannot force us to do or to think anything; it can only offer suggestions. We really get to choose. But be aware that, because the Committee has operated for so many years without opposition, it will not bow quietly. In my case, the battle seemed to get much worse before it got any better. Persistence is the key. God's word says that we are to "take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ Jesus and to pull down every high and lofty thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Virtually every thought that the Committee puts forth is an effort to exalt itself against the knowledge of God. The Committee does not wish to honor God or bring Him glory; it only wants to keep you in torment.

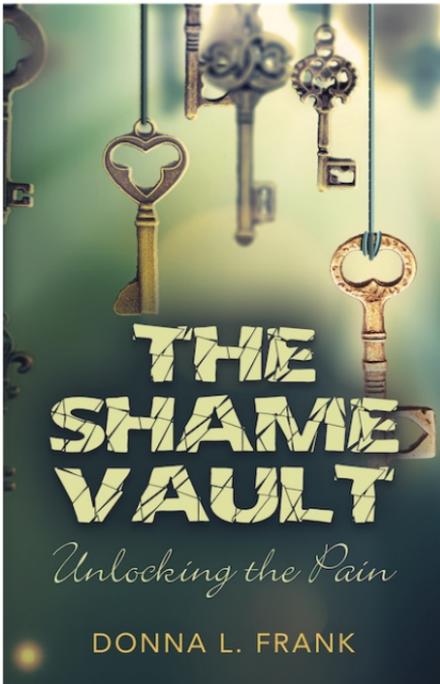
The best way for me to find the ammunition I need is to read God's word everyday. I usually read it with a pen in my hand and underline stories, passages, or words that seem to have particular meaning at the time. I also write down scriptures that I use specifically against the Committee and do my best to get them inside my mind and heart. That way, I'm ready no matter when the Committee decides to meet. I have a list of scriptures that I have posted in my home and my office. I aim to read the whole page, out loud, at least once a day. I don't want to be scrambling for a weapon in the midst of an attack; I want to be armed and ready for battle.

Tools for change:

1. Know your enemy
 - Identify the voices on the Committee members
2. Arm yourself
 - Start developing a list of scriptures to use as ammunition
 - Be specific:
 - If you battle with Rejection find out what the Bible says about that (Example: Ephesians 1:6 (NKJV) says you are accepted in the beloved)
 - If you battle with Fear, look for truth about that (Example: 2 Timothy 1:7 says I have not been given a spirit of fear but one of power, love, and a sound mind)
3. Be consistent:
 - The Committee didn't form in a day and it's not going to disappear overnight. Fight the good fight of faith, every day (1 Timothy 6:12).
4. Recognize that you are not alone:
 - One of the names of God is Jehovah Sabaoth, which means "Lord of Armies." God is our Warrior. He fights for us and it is through him that we have victory. Despite what The Committee tells us, we are never alone.
5. Find people who are willing to stand with you:
 - This was a very difficult process for me, but God kept His promise about placing the lonely in families (Psalm 68:6). He brought the people into my life to walk this out with me.
6. See #3 and repeat.

Ammunition:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23-24).



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