

# Clearing the Water Upstream

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Before I begin

I want to honour every person in this room and across the world  
who has walked through the fires of exploitation coercion and control  
and still found the courage to rise

You are the survivors

You are the reason I speak

You are the proof that even after the storm  
the river can still run clear

It is easy to look at the swirling rapids  
the chaos downstream  
and wonder how anyone could survive them

But I know those waters

I was swept up in them once  
pulled under by kindness that turned to control  
by promises that became chains

For a long time

I thought remedy meant learning how to swim harder  
to survive what I had been through

But the real remedy lives far upstream

Before the river ever reaches the rapids  
it runs through childhood  
it runs through silence and loneliness  
through generations where pain was passed like an heirloom

Before the grooming

Before the coercion

there are stories of people unseen unheard unprotected

When I speak of remedy

I speak of going back there  
to the headwaters  
to heal the soil where the river begins

That is where prevention lives

Prevention is teaching our daughters that love does not demand silence

Prevention is showing our sons that power is not control

Prevention is building strong families

safe communities

and systems that see the vulnerable

before the current takes them

The person I once was

did not need rescuing from the rapids

They needed someone to notice

the currents forming long before

Someone to tell them

that their worth was not measured by who loved them

but by the truth of who they already were

That is my work now

to clear the water upstream

to build bridges before the fall

to plant seeds of safety and awareness

in soil I may never stand on

under trees whose shade I will never sit in

Because my remedy is not revenge

it is restoration

My response is not anger

it is prevention

And when I see others still caught in the torrents

I wade in with empathy

guiding them gently toward the shore

But my eyes always look upstream  
toward where the water begins  
toward where healing can truly start

The only way the river runs clear  
is if we cleanse it at its source

So I will keep tending to that headwater  
for those yet to be born  
for those still finding their strength  
for the survivors who remind me every day  
that clarity and kindness can flow again

That is my restoration  
That is my remedy  
To clear the water upstream  
So downstream  
life can finally be gentle

*Written and delivered by Sarah Barnbrook, Founder and CEO of Away from Keyboard Inc.*