

BOOKS

Madeleine Kingsley is moved by stories of mental anguish. Stoddard Martin is impressed by candid recollections

Despair and abuse overcome

If I Chance to Talk a Little Wild

By Jane Haynes
Quartet, £20

Indescribable

By Candice Derman
Quartet £10

Reviewed by Madeleine Kingsley

THE DARK childhoods of actress Candice Derman (author of *Indescribable*) and psychotherapist Jane Haynes (*If I Chance to Talk a Little Wild*) might have sprung from the Brothers Grimm. Their stories are, however, all too painfully true.

Coincidentally, continents and time-frames apart, both women grew up as emotional, if not actual, orphans — adrift, unhappy and hungry for small acts of human kindness. Their two highly individual, must-read memoirs tell of triumph over early traumas that would have broken many.

What links their work is that Derman, who had already had successful therapy in her native South Africa, later found her way to Haynes's London consulting rooms and so to a cameo role in Haynes's erudite yet offbeat meditation on her personal and professional life.

Haynes recalls her client's sapphire eyes and striking composure. Yet, between the ages of eight and 14, Candice had consistently been sexually abused by her stepfather, his grand, colonial house having become a perverted playground. Adding devastation to her deep damage, her perpetrator was eventually imprisoned for two paltry years.

Her Jewish parents had divorced; her father was distant and her mother blundered by her wealthy remarriage bringing a seemingly enviable life of servants, exotic holidays and caviar.

Nobody questioned why the once very bright schoolchild slid into failure and a marked precociousness. Nobody suspected the charming man of the house.

Candice thus received a far lengthier sentence than her abuser — six years



Jane Haynes (above left) — 'Life has taught me that tragedy skulks round every bend in the road' — and Candice Derman — 'It would all be my fault'

of feeling utterly battered in body and spirit, solely responsible for her hideous secret.

If she spoke out, "Mom's fantasy would become a lie and I would lose her down the rabbit hole. Dad" — meaning her stepfather — "would go to jail, my sisters would be broken and it would all be my fault."

There's a literary genre known as "pity memoir", but Derman's first-person, child's-eye narrative is different in both depth and dignity. Hers is an unsparing witness statement, a shocking, raw and graphic account of her feelings, of the abuser's grooming, fumbling and eventual raping.

It's so strong a story that I wanted

to enter its pages to rescue this child from her nightmares, her self-blame, her occasional, disturbing frissons of pleasure and her overriding sense that she must be evil. I wanted to run her to a place of safety. But, in the end, Derman emerged whole, not just to survive but to thrive as a loving wife and mother. Jane Haynes reports their therapy ending as, 15 years married, Candice and her husband joyfully conceive a daughter on a romantic weekend in Provence.

"Life has taught me," writes Haynes, "that tragedy skulks round every bend in the road." Her own childhood is told

only to preface a much broader exploration of her self, her case-histories, her postnatal depression, her love of myth, poetry and the classics, Proust, Shakespeare (who knew that his plays contain not a single good mother?) and the need to fathom (with reference to Nabokov's *Lolita*) how we can ever effectively address the need for prevention of sexual offences against the young.

As a Hampstead, Jewish child of the '40s, Haynes could not rely on human nurture: her father died of syphilis when she was very small, her mother was bipolar. A school boarder at six, she strug-

gled with "homesickness for a non-existent home." Yet she became a renowned therapist by way of mentoring from R.D. Laing, enfant terrible of psychiatry, and Jungian psychoanalytic training, which she has abandoned for a more engaging, conversational style. She inspires her patients with the courage, as she puts it "to open up their warrior wounds to my sympathetic attention..."

"It's through the transcendent magic of language," she contends, "that the wounds of body and soul are cured." Troubled times, it seems, make true therapists.

Madeleine Kingsley is a therapist and freelance reviewer

Dramas and discontents in the real life of a dramatist

From a Faraway Country

By Peter Tegel
Anton Josef Publishers, £8.99
Reviewed by Stoddard Martin

PETER TEGEL is of a generation of refugees from Central Europe that enriched cultural life in the UK through postwar decades.

He has written plays for the BBC and translated extensively from Russian and German. His parents were Sudeten Germans; his father died when he was a small boy,

and his mother remarried to a Jew. She and Peter were thus forced to flee their native district when the Nazis annexed it, and Czechoslovakia as a whole when the rest of the country was occupied.

The family escaped to London to live in a minuscule flat. She took up making hats in the boy's bedroom and, through skill and contacts, made good. All the while, she remained plagued by the frustrations

of émigrés — resentment and nostalgia for the old land, a sense of alienation towards the new. Tegel writes insightfully about these in a memoir which reads like a novella. It unfolds through the eyes of the boy and carries on through those of a middle-aged man who visits Czech lands during the era of Marxism's collapse.

The boy suffers the discontent of his mother and psychological paralysis of his stepfather, a kind of distant man for whom he has fond feelings.

Another Jewish refugee, the aesthete Herz, becomes a revered mentor. Herz holds his homosexual tendencies in

check, but teenaged Peter's instincts temporarily lead him otherwise. This provokes furious rows with his mother, and the anguish of their relationship becomes a leitmotif of the book and an eventual crescendo into a moving account of her death: "She could not give me what I wanted and I could not give her what she wanted."

At every stage, we're aware of the existential cost of deracination, and Tegel's return to the Moravian haunts of his youth are motivated by an urge not only to discover who he truly is but to recollect, if he can, some moment when his mother was actually happy.

The most evocative parts of this fine little book involve those returns to the hills and forests, town squares and disused churches of a nearly forgotten past.

Whether or not Tegel is able to find what he is searching for, he is able to retrieve sensations — the heat, the look of pathways, the songs of birds — that are partly healing.

Hope born out of the vanishing of a second oppressive regime in the 1990s also passes, but a modicum of peace is achieved in the imagination.

Stoddard Martin is a writer and critic



His memoir is full of insights and reads like a novella



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