

[Opinion](#)

[News](#)

[Spirituality](#)



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It wasn't until 2011, during interviews that would ultimately become a foundation for the biography [\*Joan Chittister: Her Journey from Certainty to Faith\*](#) that Joan spoke openly to anyone about a childhood that had been marked by fear of the violence her mother faced constantly at the hands of an alcoholic stepfather. She would carry the memories and effects of that trauma for the rest of her life. It was a childhood that involved a temporary escape with her mother, as well as instructions from her mother should "the worst" occur.

If it was at the time disorienting and frightening for an only child, it would also eventually become a source of insight and resolve.

Childhood memories became a significant force behind her relentless advocacy for women in all circumstances: in the church, in society, across cultures. It also provided her insight into the fragility of others and compassion for those on the margins and in precarious circumstances.

"So somehow or other, sitting here today," she says in this episode, "I know where my life came from. It came from what I had to escape, what I had to find myself, and what I had to be able to name myself."

She knows, too, where her courage comes from. Her mother would be with her in spirit when she had to stand up to the men who wanted to keep her from speaking, who wanted to silence her questions.

"Risking the Questions" is a joint project of [Benetvision](#) and NCR. This podcast has been made possible in part by the generosity of Bill and Jeanne Buchanan.

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