

Unedited Voices of the Upper Valley

Celebrating
survivors of
domestic and
sexual violence

This collection of personal stories began in lively conversation around a table at a WISE WAEV (We're Acting to End Violence) meeting. WISE, the Upper Valley's anti-domestic and sexual violence program created WAEV to consciously offer more opportunities for community members to participate in the movement to end violence against women. As we excitedly shared ideas, the theme of bringing the realities of survivors' experiences from the hidden, secret, private to the public realm emerged. Our community is no different from any other: domestic and sexual violence are rampant but people are maddeningly unaware of its cumulative impact because perpetrators – with the larger culture's support – blame, shame and silence their victims. The diversity and uncanny similarity of tactics used in these crimes, the reality that these are often ongoing themes in people's lives across the lifespan – not isolated events, the gendered nature of perpetration and victimization and the frustrating and sometimes debilitating experiences of turning to systems for help that instead further violate those most vulnerable are among the topics that those grappling with these issues see and hear about on a regular basis but can be invisible to those not focusing their attention on these injustices.

Many people deserve enormous gratitude for the effort that has gone into this project. At the top of that list are the writers themselves. The very reasons WAEV wanted to do this: to make the invisible, visible; to highlight the ways that domestic and sexual violence impact our communities but aren't recognized due to the dynamics specific to these crimes, makes writing an act of courage and fortitude. People wrote who had never told their stories before, for whom telling is dangerous and who, at the most chaotic moments in their lives, committed themselves to telling their truths in spite of the risks. In writing workshops, putting pen to paper

was recognized as an act of social justice and voice was celebrated. Others wrote on their own, e-mailing and faxing intimate, compelling and terrifying accounts. Some wrote and realized that it is still too dangerous to have their stories printed or spoken in public but the writing was celebrated by all who had the honor to have it shared with them.

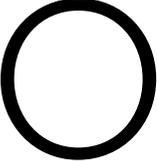
For those of you who have picked up this booklet, we hope it inspires you to tell your own story, to open your ears, hearts and minds to the realities of domestic and sexual violence that are around you all the time but that will not be shared with you unless you are ready to listen, and to join us as we work to end violence against women and children.

—*Abby Tassel*

Assistant Director, WISE

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I Cry

 n the floor of our dark bedroom in my husband's house, in what is supposed to be my home, I sob. My heart is shattered; my hope to be loved is dead. I am alone. I am afraid. No one can understand my pain. No one would bother to try. I am not worth it.

I am married to a man who does not love me, a man who doesn't even like me. I am married to a man who chose to be with me because I can be controlled. He does control me. He is always right because I am always wrong. He is always smart, because I am always stupid. He looks at me with disdain, distaste, and scorn. I feel lost—a child's sense of being lost, with nowhere to go and no idea of how to get 'unlost'.

I cry without inhibition, my sobs echo in the darkness, tears run down my face onto the dusty carpet. Isolated, hopeless, and filled with aching self-loathing, I shake with sadness. I wish I believed in God so I could pray or talk to someone.

I cry for the children I never had, and for the child I once was. I cry for the hope I had of being loved now dead. I cry for the comfort never given by the person I trust most. He holds a mirror up to me. His mirror is filled with reflections of my flaws, weaknesses, and ugliness. How can it be that there are so many? I am breathless with the shame and horror of how horrible I am. I cry.

Somewhere from downstairs comes the murmur of the television, a sound that separates us even more. How can I be so sad, hurt and broken while my husband watches television? I cry. I am alone. Because I am not loved, I do not exist.

I'm Just Going to Say It

I'm just going to say it: I was raped and no one believed me. This is what I did: I went to my counselor and she told me I should report it. So I did. The cops are saying I am lying because no one comes forward when they get raped. I got a rape kit. I am not lying. I just blacked out and don't remember details. The cops never had the kit sent to the lab and they gave me my clothes back without sending them to the lab.

The staff at WISE took my hand and said that they do believe me. Now I'm just waiting for all this court stuff to be over or dropped. I refuse to go back to that town and when I have to, I get scared. If I learned anything, it's not going to the cops about anything anymore.

My Story

My name is Laurie. I am a survivor of physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse. The abuse was so bad that many have called it torture. I am here to tell my story. I am telling you this story because I want it to be heard and I hope it can help someone else.

I grew up in a small town in Vermont. As far back as I can remember my biological parents abused me. My biological mother physically abused me in many ways, such as knocking one of my teeth out, ridiculing me, or locking me in the basement with no food or water for up to three days at a time. My biological father began sexually abusing me when I was very little, maybe as little two, but for as long as I can remember. He first brought a friend to also sexually abuse me when I was about five. I remember him saying to his friend, "This is the girl I was telling you about; she'll do whatever I tell her to do." I kind of knew what he meant and I wasn't surprised when his friend led me to a bedroom. My biological father told me never tell anyone; that they would never believe me and I would get into trouble. I did try to tell my biological mother, and she did not believe me and I did get into trouble, just like he said. That was the first time I was locked in the basement. This was just my daily life and I did not know what was okay and what was not okay.

When I hit middle school, I wrote a letter to a woman I babysat for. I wrote it to basically find out if what was happening to me was normal. That statement may sound odd to someone else, but when you have never experienced anything else it makes sense. Within a few hours after she read the letter, I was taken to a hospital. After being released from the hospital I became a foster child until I was 18. The woman I wrote to, along with the school counselor, reported the abuse to the authorities. My biological father went to court. As a result of the court hearing, he was ordered to go to counseling, which he never did. My biological family rallied around to support him. They said I was lying. Being a foster child was no picnic.

I felt like they were doing it just for the money and not for the kids. Throughout the time I was in foster care, my biological father would randomly show up and sexually abuse me. I truly felt I was bad and that I deserved everything. I had no way out. I took away two lessons from this. One lesson was that there was no one, no family, no police, no social service agency that was going to help me. The second was if I ever had kids I would protect and love them.

A few years later I met my ex-husband who seemed so charming in the beginning. He is a strong man and my hopes were that he would protect me. Boy was I wrong! The abuse was worse than with my biological parents. I heard every day from him to never tell anyone. He always gave me a story to tell for all the broken bones, bruises and black eyes. Believe it or not, I believed I loved him. I believed he loved me. I believed that every day he would change, and he would change because he really loved me. All my life, I had been taught to do everything I was told to do, and if I did, I would stay out of trouble, so I tried harder and harder to do what he told me, to be good and to obey. He controlled everything I did. I was not allowed to have friends. I had to call him when I left work so he could time me to make sure I didn't stop anywhere. He slept with a gun under his pillow. He even controlled what I ate and when. He never allowed me to weigh over 99 pounds. I was beaten severely once for sneaking a Ring Ding.

I had two beautiful daughters by him. I remember when they were little that he would hold a gun to their heads and said, "If you ever say anything I will kill them, make you watch and then kill you." I knew I had to stay strong to protect them. I thought being strong included doing what I was told and being quiet.

When my ex-husband abused me, I was not allowed to cry. If I cried the abuse got worse. I learned I could go to "my safe place". "My safe place" was a mountain with a beautiful view and I was holding my kids. Going to "my safe place" got me through. If I was there, I could handle anything. During therapy I learned that going to "my safe place" is really called dissociation. But to me it was a real place. Even now it is hard to believe it was all in my mind.

In January 2009, I stopped at a car garage and I had a really horrible black

eye. I remember the garage owner looking at me and saying, "I have seen enough black eyes and broken bones, I'm calling the cops." I was terrified and I told him he couldn't call the cops and I left. He called them anyway and the cops showed up at my work. The cops arrested my ex-husband and charged him with assault, but I was too scared to tell them anything. They told me to go to WISE and to see a therapist. I was too scared to go to WISE. When I was getting a sandwich at a local place, I saw a therapist that some people had said I should see. I knew who she was. Years before, she had brought her child for my biological mother to baby-sit. That was when I was about 8. I had liked her. I thought she was a good mother. So I thought I could trust her. And my long journey to a different world began.

There was nothing easy about this journey. It has been tough and it remains tough. I am telling my story for several reasons. Because I had to be quiet for so many years, it feels good to speak out and choose to use my real name. I know I am stronger because I am able to do that. Another reason is because of what I want the public to know about women like me so that they might pull together as communities to help others. I want them to understand that it is not that easy to just walk away. I have heard any number of people who say, "Why didn't you just leave if you were getting abused?" And they have no sympathy. I want you to know that I truly believed that if I left, he would kill me and kill my daughters. That I guess you can understand. What may be harder to understand is that because I had known nothing else, a big part of me really believed I was wrong, that I was a bad person to tell. I was afraid of the future, of leaving because I didn't know what to expect. Even though I was being controlled and abused, I knew, or I thought I knew, how to handle that. I knew what to expect, and I had "my safe place." In the end, he served a year for abuse. I happen to believe that he served only one year because the police did an inadequate investigation and there was inadequate communication between law enforcement and the State's Attorney's Office. But what's new? The system had never worked for me before.

While he was in jail I had very good reason to believe that he would get someone to kill me. He sent another man to pass on his threats and to "keep me quiet."

I remained terrified. During the year he was in prison, no one in my biological family praised me for talking to the police. In fact, my biological mother, during another time he was in prison for abusing me, went to visit him twice in prison, wrote him letters, and referred to him as “my favorite son-in-law.” So what was new?

On the the eve before his release, I fled Vermont with three suitcases. WISE, my therapist and others helped me. I had to leave my daughters and everything I knew behind. I don’t know whether people in that small community I grew up in ever ask him why didn’t he stop abusing me in the same way they had asked me why I hadn’t left the abuse. But I do know that he still works in that community, that he has his house there, and that his life has been little disrupted. That pretty much feels like being a foster kid all over again.

I am grateful that my daughters have the opportunity to have a better way of life than I have had. Part of what has given me courage is believing, even when they were mad at me for leaving, that I was doing something necessary for their own better future. I am trying to be a role model and lead them to a better future. I am grateful to WISE for being there and understanding women in my situation. I am grateful to you for hearing my story.

—*Laurie*

Rape is the Worst Crime

Rape is the worst crime someone can experience as a victim. It steals from you more than society thinks. It leaves the victim violated, humiliated, damaged and scarred. Sometimes a person/victim is lucky enough to get the support and help they need to heal. Many other times people don't, and ultimately everyone suffers.

I was not lucky enough to get help. Actually, I experienced the opposite. The one time a friend convinced me to seek legal help (for one of the milder sexual assaults I experienced), I suffered more from it. I told the local police, and of course they said they'd take care of it. At first I was relieved when the victim's advocate contacted me for an appointment. This feeling was short-lived. I thought maybe these acts committed against me really weren't okay. Maybe they could stop. Maybe people really cared and possibly I could rely on someone to help stop the suffering and abuse of the more serious sexual assaults that had victimized me. I was definitely wrong.

I quickly found out that my instincts to not contact the police were right and I should have listened to them. The local officers lied to me. They didn't even do the job they're paid to do. The victim's advocate was even worse. I left her office feeling more humiliated, guilty, exposed and defeated than before—something I didn't believe possible until that moment. I became even less trusting of others. Worse than that, I became silent. I internalized my pain and suffering.

I've suffered such deep depressions and extreme PTSD symptoms. I've attempted to take my own life because of it. I never healed from my traumas, my silence just increasing the suffering, something I've wasted half of my life to realize. I'm not proud of any of this. My hope is that others obtain the help and support they need to not be controlled by their attackers and bad experiences. I hope other people find a person or people to confide in safely. It does ease the suffering some.

WISE is a good organization with staff that seem to truly care, want to and are willing to help in such painful experiences or situations. I've never allowed myself

to trust anyone to get rape kits done or to rely on the local law enforcement to help with my years-long stalker and many-times rapist. But I did call WISE once (with the urging of my friend). The staff were sincere, genuinely concerned and though they generally count on local law enforcement, they respected my wishes and understood why I wouldn't and couldn't go to the police. Together, the WISE staff and I figured out a different plan involving a pro-bono lawyer. I considered my contact with and positive experiences from WISE a stepping stone on my path to healing and possible recovery.

Although I don't count on the police for any help of my own, I know that such crimes are handled differently from my own experiences in most cases nowadays. There are some local cops that will help and seem to care. Sexual assaults seem to be taken more seriously and handled more sensitively, as well.

I know being silent, holding in the pain and events from my life, have hurt me in the long run and I urge other victims (of similar crimes, especially) to tell someone you can trust. By just talking about it, it eases the pain, shame, guilt and control your attackers hold over you, your life and thoughts. You will realize you aren't alone and the bad things you think and feel are not you, but the result of the awful violations done to you. Rather than suffering through the darkness alone, we can share our stories. It helps us heal as well as helping others in many ways. We really aren't alone, and though it's a common misconception, it really isn't our fault this happened.

—Jennifer

Let My Voice Be Heard

I was a victim of abuse starting as a child by my stepfather. I grew up knowing to keep my mouth shut. In those days what happened at home stayed at home. Abuse followed me into high school years where my boyfriend tried to rape me. Again, my mouth was shut. As time went by I found myself in two more abusive relationships.

It all started innocently with the occasional sarcastic remarks about my looks, clothes, job, friends, my very being. I lost myself little by little. I had minimal to no self-esteem, depression set in like a ton of bricks on my chest. Anxiety, hypertension, panic attacks all became a daily battle for me. I became afraid to be the real me. The ME I really liked and loved. Deep down I knew I was a good person.

Going to work kept getting more difficult as the physical abuse took over. Make-up wasn't covering the black eyes, wearing long sleeves in the dead of summer looked out of place and foolish. The silly excuses I came up with now seem so ridiculous yet no one seemed to question it. Little stories about walking into the door casings, stepping on the shovel the wrong way so it came up and hit me in the face, falling off step ladders, slipped down the stairs and so on. These stories were my survival mechanism. Keep my mouth shut and let the outside world think everything is wonderful. I always wanted the childhood dream of getting married. Having children and the white picket fence.

I did start counseling since the problem was me or so I was repeatedly told. I remember telling my therapist that I felt like a whipped puppy dog. Being raped by my husband which left lasting scars on my leg from his toenails holding me down, my therapist called it marital rape that should be reported. However, this was the man I thought loved me. My fear of a failed marriage helped me minimize the desperation inside. I started reading self-help books to no avail. Finally being forced to hold a gun to my head with my young son in the other room I had the stamina to walk out with my son.

I left the home that I had helped build and pay off. I left all sorts of worldly

possessions but I had my life back. The problem hadn't been me after all, my self-esteem began to come back, the anxiety let up but then after a short while I fell in love again. All I could think was that there really had to be a problem with me. The controlling and verbal abuse began again, then the physical. The cycle of violence continued for another 19 years.

I had grown up to take on the role of "caretaker". I would protect and guide those I loved and cared about. Always feeling sorry for people, I thought I could help them or change them. I know now you can't change personalities. I can change only myself.

I finally contacted Voices Against Violence and got the answers & help I needed. They offered me a class called "Pattern Changing". I realized I couldn't change the abuser but I could change myself and my reactions. I discovered who I was as an individual. A woman with plenty of good qualities and the ability to succeed.

Eventually everything caught up in a whirlwind and I became homeless with sixty-seven cents in my pocket and a car that got repossessed. I was pathetic. Thank God for the Upper Valley Haven.

They have helped me immensely.



At age 52, I am now driving a secondhand car, working and looking for an apartment. Sometimes the best thing to do is to change people, places and things. It's a hard long road but it gets better and healthier.

Today I can speak up and tell my story. My voice can be heard. Abuse is real, it hurts, it can start to destroy you as a person. There is help out there but awareness of these services is a necessity.

In closing my best advice is to trust in God. He has helped me every step of the way. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go, I will guide thee with mine eye." Palms 32:8.

Come out of your shell and hope for happiness and internal peace, achieve all you can be. You are so worth it. Help stop the violence. Please find the strength & courage to let your voice be heard.

—Brenda Hatch

My Voice

It's been a long time now. I have details. But the details feel like shattered glass. So, here I share what I have written. Poems that assemble the broken glass in some way. It served me to write them—speaking, as it were, my experience.

The whole mess started out simply enough. I tried to train myself to be good, to be obedient, in order to deserve love. Behaving. And for a long time it worked. I had an enviable life. It all looked good on the outside.

But no life examined from the outside is what it seems. Mine certainly wasn't. And no matter how hard I tried I couldn't make it so. Couldn't figure out the system that I lived in where the rules changed according to someone else's whims and needs and desires. And before too long, I felt like there was

No Way Out

He makes me want to kill myself.

I am the mouse, frightened off with a threat.

In a heartbeat a cleaver is brought down in my path.

I turn, try another direction. Once more
the slam of the cleaver.

I scurry away
scratching hard to find freedom.

The flash and bam of the cleaver.

I race. Blocked.

I turn. Bam.

Crash of the cleaver
brought down by a certain hand.

Again. And again.

And
again.

I run worrying. Wondering if I will never ever find a way.

I tire.

The hand grabs my tail
I squeal, scrabble, scramble,
running nowhere.

Exhausted and nearly spent
my feet slow until finally I
lie quiet, my body rocking back and forth
with each heaving pant.

Lifted, the hand
dangles me into a palm. I feel
hot laughing breath on my fur.
I am petted with soft strokes
as I tremble and squeak,
afraid and pleading.

The gentleness continues and
for a time the palm is still. I settle
and curl into its folds.

Panic subsides.

Until the hand shifts.

Until it all happens again.

And yet—there was a way out. In the beginning I did it for my children. Because however broken and useless I felt, I knew they needed me, and I loved them with all my heart. So, I tried.

And, like the little mouse, I crept. Slowly finding a way to be safe, to do what I needed to do, and to be okay-enough. I began with a series of

Firsts

My heart bangs
into my neck and ears.
I read directions.
I read them again.
Soon the children will
be up and I
want to please.
I have been told
by shadows past
that I'm no good.
I read directions.
Flour, egg, milk,
baking soda,
sugar, vanilla.
Can I do it?
I hear,
"Jesus, just let me do it."
I hear,
"I am no good."
I stop.
I read directions.
I worry.
I stop.
I pick up the spoon.
I worry.
I say, "Mix the dry,"
I shush the shadow's shadow
for the first time.

I read directions.
I worry, but mix in
the milk and egg.
And one by one
I make imperfect
pancakes.
One by one.
One by one . . .

—*Suzanne*

That was Me

My Bella, my beautiful magical Bella. She is a German Short Hair Pointer. My son and I adopted her 4 years ago. She is a gentle yet powerfully brave being. She is my steady mate. My always-there with a gentle stare and, knowing when I'm in pain, sits with me.

My Bella was on the receiving end of Tony's violence, days before he almost took my life. It was one of those mornings Tony woke me up raging on the phone speaking as loud as a yell in Greek. God knows what business deal he was trying to convince someone of. Desperate for something to work, losing everything as fast as it came in. He got off the phone and screamed for me to "get the fuck downstairs and in the car" to drive him to the train. I was getting dressed. It wasn't fast enough. The dogs were out. I ran downstairs. I heard him yelling and losing it on them to get down the hill and in the house. Three ran in and Bella stood back on the rock wall. She was frightened. I saw her fear. I said, "stop yelling Tony, I'll get her." He told me to go fuck myself, lunged forward and grabbing Bella by the collar, pulled her off the wall towards him and began kicking her screaming, "you fucking bitch, this should be you. I'll fucking kill you." I jumped on him and tried to stop him and was shoved away. Poor Bella stayed by his side. The whole scene was like a giant fire untamed and imploding, enveloping all three of us. I don't know how long the struggle went on. I next remember carrying Bella to the back of the car and driving Tony to the train in a trance. He got out and I drove home in a flood of tears and prayers. Bella and I sat in the driveway for a good hour 'til the garbage truck pulled in and we ran inside. I promised Bella that day I would never let anything happen to her ever again. That promise I kept.

A week later I picked Tony up from the train. Tony opened my door and said he was driving. I was making a nice dinner and he seemed in good spirits so I asked how his day was. "Shitty," he said. I didn't say anything to that. But by his tone and driving pattern I knew a storm was headed my way. He asked me things. I answered.

There was no way I could get around it. As we got onto our road—a secluded quiet road—he started touching me and pulling at my arm yelling at me for “fucking his life up,” at the same time speeding up. I asked him to slow down and he sped up. He looked my way and screamed “I’m going to kill you” and headed the car straight at a giant oak and floored the gas. It was a flash and I screamed “No. Please. Stop.” The car spun and Tony braked. We stopped somehow on a dime and my door was at the tree. As fast as we stopped he began driving again. I thought “this is it, he is really going to kill me today.” He drove towards home. I asked quietly “please stop the car, please Tony stop the car. I need to get out. Please. Please Tony. I’ll call the police if you don’t.” He laughed and said “Try. You will have nothing if you do that. I will take everything from you, your house, your son, everything. You will have a shoebox.” He wouldn’t stop. He sped to our house, pulled in the driveway. I opened my door and in god’s arms I walked inside and dialed 911.

The police came and Tony was taken away by them. And that is the beginning of how I got away. Just the very beginning.

53 Years Ago

5 3 years ago this coming summer I was a 13-year-old boy attending a summer school/camp with my older brother. We both had been accepted to prep school for enrollment that coming fall with the condition we attend summer school to improve our writing and reading skills, while also getting a jump start on math and Spanish. Our parents found a small school within easy commuting distance which also provided a variety of sports. It looked like an ideal way to spend the summer even if one had to be in the classroom for a few hours each day.

After a couple of weeks my brother and I had established ourselves as two of the top athletes at the school and also found the scholastic piece to be very acceptable. It was shaping up to be a lot more fun than either one of us had imagined.

The classes were small, maybe 6-8 students per section. This provided for a lot of one-on-one time between teacher and student as needed. In my reading class our teacher would have us place our desks in a semicircle facing him at the front of the room. The desks were the old-fashioned kind that were open on the left so you could slide into your seat, with the arm rest on the right that attached to the desk top in front. During class time our teacher would bring his chair in front of one student at a time and go over their assignment. After a while, when he would sit in front of me, he would pull his chair in very close. He would essentially have both his legs on either side of mine which enabled him to slide his hand onto my lap and eventually he started to caress me. This is when everything starts to get a little crazy for me. Here I am a young naive kid who has very little knowledge of the sexual ways of the world . . . other than the expected experimenting with myself that I was assuming all the guys were doing. Now I have an older man, who is respected in the teaching community, rubbing my crotch, albeit very discreetly so as to not alert the other boys as to what is going on. This went on for a couple of classes until the day he had me stay after class to review an assignment. As soon as everyone had exited the room he locked the door and had me stand in a small alcove in the room. He then unzipped my pants, put his hand

on my penis and started to caress it, all the while telling me this was our little secret and didn't I think what he was doing felt good. About a minute later another teacher came by and knocked on the door asking to come in, this brought an abrupt end to that session.

However, he had "broken the ice" and unbeknownst to me things were only going to escalate from there.

There was a small bathroom that adjoined the classroom that soon became "our" private room to go to go over assignments, this was necessary because the other boys were "disrupting the class." As soon as he and I were in the bathroom he would lock the door, unzip my pants and perform manual and then oral sex on me until I ejaculated. Now, you have to understand something . . . whenever he asked me if what he was doing felt good I would have to honestly reply yes . . . because it did. He wasn't hurting me physically and I really wasn't sure how I was supposed to react. He didn't have me do anything for him, nor did anything happen outside the classroom, at that time. This little charade continued weekly 'til summer school ended when I thought I wouldn't see him again and that would be it. Or so I thought . . . a week before school started he contacted my parents and arranged to have me go to his house on a Saturday morning to go over the two book reports I had to write for my new prep school. Once there we went to the attic where he had a small office set up. After reviewing the reports, which by the way he had completely rewritten, he performed one final act of oral sex on me.

The hard part for me was not knowing how to tell anyone what was going on. I'm pretty sure I knew something wasn't right and a level of embarrassment was at play, always thinking my friends would make fun of me. I didn't say anything to my parents because I didn't know how to. They never had the "good touch bad touch" talk with us. . . . Dad simply gave us a book titled: *For Boys Only*, and I guess we were supposed to figure it out for ourselves. So here I was, a 13-year-old kid being sexually molested by an authority-type figure and I was keeping it all bottled up inside.

And keeping it bottled up I did . . . not until I married my second wife when I was 32 years old did I share the burden I had been carrying for all those years. Since then I had told my story to seven other people, and now, after today, it's totally out in the open.

So, I guess the obvious question might be . . . did I need or want to seek help to deal with the psychological trauma I was carrying around for what had happened to me. In the years immediately following that summer I think I just tried to forget about it. I was heavily involved in prep school stuff and really didn't give it much thought . . . other than constantly telling myself I was not a homosexual.

I led a very promiscuous lifestyle in college and then again after my first marriage ended. This I think was a subconscious way of reconfirming my anti-homosexual feeling making sure I was only interested in females.

Over the years I became very involved in youth sports, coaching little league baseball, elementary school girls basketball, 13-year-old Babe Ruth right up through 18 year olds, and high school baseball for about nine years. All during that time I was constantly reminding myself to be very careful not to get myself in a compromising situation. When it was time to give out uniforms and the boys would be trying on their pants, I always made sure there was another adult in the room with me. When I would drive team members to games I always made sure there were at least two players in the car. If I had to stay late after a practice waiting for a player's mom or dad to pick them up, I was never alone with the player.

Now you have to understand, no one around me knew I was fighting those demons . . . always fearing I might do something I would regret . . . but I made sure I was a person everyone could trust. I definitely tried to project a machismo persona . . . a man's man if you will . . . and this image was out there for everyone to see . . . both men and women.

So, why am I telling my story today? I guess it's about getting the message out that keeping all that stuff inside really isn't healthy . . . it takes up way too much time and energy which probably could have been avoided had I spoken up to my parents when it all first came down. And if you can't share with your parents, seek out an adult who you trust . . . the point is what happened to me was wrong and I should have spoken with someone immediately. I have no idea where the guy is today or if he continued to prey on other young men. If I had/have the chance to meet him face to face I think I would simply ask him why me . . . and did he have any idea what his actions did to me while I was growing up.

—*Bob Bubba* Williams

Eyes Now Open

I met a man who had violated me in so many ways to where the memories of what he did haunts me every day, even though he is no longer around me or my son. When I first met him, he was nice and charming and he told me that he wanted to be a family man; only used drugs when he was 18 and he never had a criminal record. He was my ideal man and I was his ideal prey, just barely 18, still in high school, graduated June 2008 and started college. I never used drugs, committed a crime or drank alcohol. The man I met was Heath, his name is like the candy bar but there was nothing sweet underneath the wrapper.

Our only contact at first was by mail and by phone, so it did not concern me too much that he would send me letters every week and call me three times a day. I tried to see past his worrisome obsession towards me in his letters and our phone conversations. I wanted to be cared for by someone and was in a period of time when no one was able to show me that kind of care. Heath was not on the sex offender registry and I felt like he might be safe to be with and I really wanted him to be, despite my gut feeling that there was something wrong about him.

The first time we had sex was not long after we met, and three weeks later I was pregnant. At that point I lost my humanity to him and became his property. I left my job, left college and left everyone I knew behind. I was now under his control and felt as though I no longer had control over my own life. I had nowhere I could go without him knowing where I was and had minimal access to things that would aid me to leave. He threatened me if I left him and in his words he would tell me “this baby can’t be alive if we are not together as a couple.” The first time I left him for good was the first time he laid his hands on me, hitting me in the stomach while I was five months pregnant. I filed Domestic Assault Charges against him and because I was afraid of him being free and coming after me I never followed through with it. The only reason Heath was arrested and sent to prison was because he was on probation for a sex crime he committed in 2002 and was caught using cocaine.

It was almost two years later when the court ordered supervised visitation for Heath to meet his son for the first time. The facility where they met was supervised and was also supposed to maintain no contact between the victim and the abuser. Due to the incompetence of one individual, I was told to contact Heath and set up visitations with him. This individual gave me his phone number in order for me to contact him. This later formed into Heath being able to carry my son out to me, seeing the expression on Heath's face had me once again in the grasp of fear. So after weeks of contact between Heath and myself I dropped the Relief From Abuse Order. Heath told me he had changed and that he was sorry, he took classes on domestic abuse and knew how it affected me. What I noticed from what Heath learned through his classes was how to manipulate me more and where he went wrong the first time we were together. I never trusted him but allowed him to come back into now mine and my son's life under the conditions that he never hurt me or my son and he never use drugs while he was with us or he was out of our lives for good.

I set myself in the middle of Heath and my son, but Heath later turned the tables placing himself in the middle. Heath used my son to control me to do what he wanted me to do and to keep me from calling the police to have him removed from my home. Heath would tell me that he loved my son and put his hands on my son's head when I told him that I was done with him and that I wanted him out. Heath was unfazed when I told him that I would call the police if he did not leave.

I watched Heath hurt my son a day after my son had surgery. I froze for just one minute before I reached for my son to take him away from his own father. Heath turned away from me, when I made a move towards him holding my son. I later paid for my defensive actions, and what Heath did to me not only broke me but took away my will to live.

Heath raped me, he held me down with his body, the weight forcing me to struggle for air, making me wish that it would be over before I stopped breathing, causing my heart to stop. This event caused me to feel pure hatred for someone that I have never felt before or since. I never shared this story directly with anyone when it happened, and when I did it was a year later and it was considered too late to prosecute, there was no evidence, no witnesses. I blocked out my memories of

the events for that year which had come back full force but were still misconstrued. Heath and I were also in an intense fight in family court and even this could have caused my case against Heath to be viewed as something other than me wanting justice for the crimes he committed. Heath will likely never be charged with raping me, nor the abuse he did to my son and I. I will never get the justice I feel I rightfully deserve, which makes the memories of how Heath treated me and my son so real every day and the regrets I have over this is like death knocking at my door waiting for me to open it.

This led me to write my poem *Forgiveness* because it was something I needed to do to let go of the pure hatred I felt towards Heath, which was eating me up inside and tearing me apart piece by piece. This poem has never been for him, it is my way to take back the control of my life, and this is how it goes.

*I forgive you because I have to
To move on from this place
I forgive you for the petty shit you did
Like when I had to stay
In that place of hopeless fear
You built for me to live
I forgive you for taking away my voice
And my will to live
I forgive you for treating me that way
Even though you said you loved me
I forgive you for putting your faults on me
While you broke me down*

*I forgive for the lies you told
And now I am letting go
Of that fear you made me feel
While you were around
I forgive you because I am ready
To leave this place of shame
I walked away from your hurt and sorrow
And I'm never walking back
So don't tell me that you love me
Or even that you have changed
I have heard all those lies you tell
And dealt with all the pain
I have changed my feelings that you left me with
Which were broken and ashamed
I forgive you because I have to
Because I have chosen to change!*

—Amanda Perry

The Worst Part

The worst part of the whole thing is that the police didn't believe me. After working with them for over 8 months, looking at mug shots, giving them statements, being honest, and trusting them, they accused me of making the whole thing up. Of choking myself. Of punching myself in the face. Of getting semen and blood from the hospital where my boyfriend worked. Of raping myself.

That there was not someone who attacked me in the middle of the night while I was asleep. That there was not someone who waited in the closet in my apartment. That there was not someone who ate one of my bananas while he waited. That there was not someone who used my kitchen knife as a weapon. That there was not someone who punched me repeatedly in the face, choked me, stuffed a pair of my underwear in my mouth, tied my hands behind my back with my own nightgown, told me not to scream or he would kill me.

That there was not a man who pulled me down on the bed, forced me to give him a hand-job, raped me with his mouth, squeezed my breasts, turned me over on my stomach, getting ready to rape me from behind. That I did not reach for the knife. That I did not chase him out of the bedroom with the knife. That I did not stab him in the back. That the knife did not break. That he did not come after me and strangle me. That I was not able to fight him off. That I did not plead with him to leave. That he did not leave by the screen door. That there was not his blood all over the carpet and blinds.

That I did not run out of my apartment and bang on all the doors in the building. That the three guys in the apartment did not see me shaking and beaten up. That they did not call the police. That the police did not drive me to the hospital. That I did not have a rape kit done. That semen and blood and evidence were not collected.

No.

None of that happened.

None of that existed.

According to the two detectives, I wanted to get out of the lease of my apartment. I wanted to break up with my boyfriend. That was why I made it all up.

They told me that there was no knife.

They had proof that I was a liar because after four hours of interrogation I failed the lie-detector test. I failed to identify anyone in the mug shots. I was the one to blame.

To not be believed. That is the worst of all.

—*Gretchen Curtis*

Farm Lady

I sat in my truck, pondering, the lady had wanted to talk all those years ago. I did not know what to say at the time and did not linger to give her space to expand. Today, I am on the Board of that bank; every time I take the steps I remember the shrouds of her life and how hidden her world was from even the people on their property.

When I was a teen-aged boy, I worked on the nearby dairy farm assisting the farmer with chores. I'd help milk the cows, line them up for their welcome ritual, turn them out, clean the milking area and take on any job that needed my attention. It was good honest work and I enjoyed the opportunity to learn, grow strong, earn, and took pride in my accomplishments.

I think back on the farmer, that large man with a determined purpose to his demeanor. He did things routinely and he did them well. He was the leader and he kept at things until they were completed in good order. His wife would appear in late afternoon with something to drink, a thermos for us in cold weather, iced tea or lemonade in summer. She was quietly kind and often complimentary. I never noticed much about their relationship.

In the heat of the summer the farmer's muscles would be taut as he slung bales of hay, assisted a cow with birth, or worked the machinery; there didn't seem anything he could not do. I worked hard beside him keeping up as best I could. Ours was a respectful boss and employee relationship and it worked well. I was glad of the job and he was glad for the help.

Several years after I'd left and gone to college, I'd heard that the lady and the farmer divorced. One summer's day I had been in the bank, she had greeted me and as I expressed sorrow for the loss of her marriage she quietly exclaimed while her eyes searched mine:

"That was the most abusive marriage ever." The next few moments were exceedingly awkward, neither of us spoke, she seemed waiting for me to speak. "It

was nice to see you, and take care” drifted from my lips as I hurried down the stairs.

Today, as the heat steams off the hood of my truck, I wonder at the strength he must have exerted over her for all of those years. Had he mentally, physically and sexually abused her all that time? The questions were haunting—for I was there every day and had no idea of things amiss. In a world where marriage is meant to be a season of trust, had he squandered it to satisfy his own appetite and need to control another? Did he drop his mask of self-sufficiency and use his strong hands for another’s disaster? She had chosen to get out—was it the first true peace she had known in decades?

Today, as a man who is aware of such atrocities in our world, I could speak to her and give her the space to expand. These bank steps remain the steps of silence and courage for I know others suffer such treatment still today—one incident or a lifetime—in pain and fearful silence. Today, our world calls out to us to trust, yet it depends upon all of us, the systems, the police, the hospital, the lawyers, the judges, the laws. I call on you to trust what another says in fear. Stand by them—for theirs is a profound truth, often silent, for fear of retribution.

—*Richard Huntley*

Fading Flowers

Flowers fading on the wall
Clock is standing ten feet tall
He is fighting, she is crying on the floor
There is no hero here any more

Neighbors hear them down the hall
Screams and crying "please no more"
He is fighting, she is crawling towards the door
He screams her name and call her whore
As he calmly shuts the door

Flowers fading on the wall
Clock is standing ten feet tall
Lights are flashing all around
And there's bodies on the ground

—*Betty Salzinger*

Shattered Pieces of My Life

A fter an enjoyable evening of playing volleyball, I quickly stopped by the store to pick up something I needed for work the next day. I never would buy that item. As I got out of my car, I heard “Don’t say a word!” as a man stuck something into my back. I suddenly couldn’t breathe. What was he going to do to me? I managed to say, “Don’t hurt me . . . my grandsons need me.” “Then do what I say,” he replied. He forced me into the back seat of his car and told me to lie face down and not move. I did what I was told for fear that he might kill me. He got in and started the car and quickly drove off. I was scared but tried to keep calm. I looked up to try and see where we were going. “Keep your face on the seat,” he yelled at me. Soon the sky was dark and the car stopped. My heart began racing. I had a pit in my stomach. I thought I was going to be sick. I just knew he was going to kill me. He opened the back door and told me to turn over and take off my jacket. I did what he told me. He shoved me back down on the seat and told me not to move. He pulled off my boots and then my pants. I knew what he was going to do. I tried to hold back the tears and not show any fear. The touch of his hands on my body made me cringe. He laughed and said, “Relax . . . you are going to enjoy this.” I finally got my first glimpse of him when he climbed on top of me and raised my shirt and undid my bra. A ski mask covered his face but those eyes and that voice I will never forget. I tried to resist his touches. But when he grabbed the knife and ran it across my face, I cried. He said, “Stop fighting me or I will use this. Do you want to walk around with a scar on your face?” “No,” I sobbed. “Well then . . . relax because this is going to be the best sex you have ever had.” He laughed in a creepy way. As he did every disgusting sexual act to me, I became sicker and cried harder. His sloppy kisses on my lips and face made me want to puke. My

mind thought of my daughter and grandsons as he raped me. Then he decided that he wanted his orgasm to go into my mouth. I turned my head and it went all over my face and in my hair. He was so angry with me. He grabbed the knife and yelled, “you bitch!” I began to tremble with fear for now I had really made him angry. He told me I was going to pay and with that he violently abused every inch of my body with his hands and mouth. The force at which he handled my body made me cry out in pain to which the man laughed, “I knew you would enjoy it,” as my body betrayed me by having an orgasm. Then he threw me out of the car without my pants and underwear. As he got into the driver’s seat, he yelled to me, “I know where you live and when I want more I’m coming to get it from you.” I trembled and sat there in the snow crying for a long time in fear that he would come back and kill me. I wanted to die but then I thought of my grandsons who needed me. I got up and found my boots and my coat and put them on. Then I walked and walked toward lights in the distance. I finally could see the back of the store. Fear gripped me! What if my car and keys weren’t there, what would I do? I had very few clothes on and didn’t want anyone to see me. Tears welled up again. I was thankful to see my car and even more thankful to see my keys lying on the front seat. I quickly drove home and hopped right into the shower. But the hot shower was not long enough to wash away the disgusting feeling of what had just happened. When the water turned cold, I wrapped myself in a towel and my blanket. I laid down on my bed and cried until I fell asleep. No, I didn’t report what had happened and in the morning I went to work like nothing had happened. No one at work had a clue what had occurred the night before but the pain was so great I needed help because I knew without help that I wouldn’t survive this. So I called WISE and that is when my recovery from abuse began . . . and the shattered pieces of my life began to make something beautiful.

—*Melanie Devoid*

It was rape.

The fact that I called you after, asking if the job offer in your fancy company that you dangled in front of me was still on the table, doesn't mean it wasn't rape.

The fact that I had way too much to drink, a fabulous dinner in a storybook café perched over the water and that you paid—you know I never could have—doesn't mean it wasn't rape.

The fact that I said “no” and you pretended to think that I didn't mean it—even though I was almost passed out, I did say “no”—doesn't mean it wasn't rape. You even acknowledged it. Your sickening moans and what I can remember you said but cannot write or say because it is so disgusts me, doesn't mean it wasn't rape.

The fact that I didn't go to the police or the hospital, doesn't mean it wasn't rape.

The fact that I didn't admit to myself right away that it was rape, doesn't mean it wasn't rape.

The fact that I went on with my life, doesn't mean it wasn't rape.

The fact that I have been able to have relationships, learn to love myself and appreciate my body only means that I, like other survivors, are strong and resilient. It doesn't mean it wasn't rape.

It was rape.

Silence is Screaming

I know him and you know him
He walks our halls and
Drives on your street
While I stand
Alone
With this fiery secret
Smouldering,
Discoloring, dooming
Your pretty pictures of
Grinning cookies and
Dancing breadsticks.
Kumbaya.
I know him and so do you.

I hate when you ask me
“Are you sure it really happened?”
Let me check in with my nightmares
And get back to you.
Would that make it more real?
Would YOU feel better?
Yes. I’m sure.
I’m sure.
I know him and you do too.

I hate that you turn to stone,
Fear,
When I say it.

Rape.
It's not an illness I'm
Breathing in your face.
It's a word
With a definition
And it happened here
In your world
And mine
I know him and you do too.

And I hate it when you say
"It could be worse.
Be thankful.
At least you're not dying."
I already died.
Power and will forces
Sucked through his
Straw of entitlement.
I'm trying to live again.
There's nothing worse than this. Now.
Dead.
At least it's not empty.
Not blind.
Not isolated.
It's not waiting around the corner
With memories that
Talk to the inside of my head.
My head. A rusty old tank
Junkyard truck that only starts
On a good day.

My vision dimmed five shades
Darker.
I don't trust you.
We know him and he knows us.

I hate that you have limits
But I can live without your help
If you must live within your fear.
Help means that
You believe me
You share my anger
Please take some away,
It makes me feel poisonous.
Shameful.
Stand with me
Speak out loud
Don't make me be silent.
He knows me and I know you.

—*Amy Trage*

Ceiling View

“You told me we’d make love when I came home after finishing the operation—and you’re asleep!”

The yelling woke me—Startled in my slumber. Why was my husband YELLING?! Lord, it’s after midnight.

“You told me you’d wait up and now you’re asleep; I work all day and you are asleep!” Louder with each word.

“I waited up until after 11 and then fell asleep—that only meant I was tired.”

Oh my God—more yelling—a break; now: speak—“Could you please not wake the children?”

“Come to the bathroom with me”—oh Lord, if I don’t go the yelling will surely wake the kids. I fear this night already. He leads angrily, I follow sleepily and not wanting any of this evening now.

I hope if I am quiet this will all just go away. After using the facilities, he brushes his teeth—I wait.

A hand goes up across the door, the latch closes, he moves imposingly in front of the door; not 3’ between the door and the sink wall, I try to sit down. “Stand up here and listen to me.” I stand.

“You made me a promise, how can you not be awake and greeting me?” moving in my face.

“I tried but I fell asleep after 11pm”

Yelling—“That’s not good enough”

“It is the truth and it only means I was tired”

Moving still closer while yelling “Oh no, it means my needs do not matter enough to you”

The spit of the word “matter” still on my face— “That is not so.” I try to step sideways, he follows.

“Well if I mattered you’d have been waiting up to make love like you said you would”

“Everything was under the pillow, I was ready”

“It sure didn’t look that way to me”

“Yes, I fell asleep”

The door is unlatched, he steps aside—“Let’s go.”

He waits; I pass through the doorway and move quickly ahead of him back to the bedroom, get into bed and huddle in the fetal position, far to my side, wondering what is next

Have I died? I am no more than 3” long and am not visible, I don’t think. I am on the ceiling, my back flattened tight to the ceiling, I am looking down. The man does not look up. The lady in the night shirt is still curled up, softly crying. The man is yelling that he has to have her, he has to. He strides angrily over to her side of the bed, still yelling, pulls the covers off, grips her nightshirt and pulls it up, spreads her legs and viciously starts pumping. She cringes, “What are you crying for bitch?” Tears openly flow; wondering at how inhumane a man can be, how torn she will be, what will happen if the children wake, how did anyone ever get so vicious, her life was never supposed to look like this. Her tears soak through the pillow case. He finishes, throws the covers back on her, gets into bed and is finally asleep after five eternal minutes.

I am pushing the nightshirt down, silently, inch by inch, easing myself out of bed—to not wake the murderer of my soul. I tiptoe slowly to the bathroom, cleanse myself and wipe away blood from a tear that stings. Head in my hands, I sob softly for the life I wished I did not live.

River of Emotion

There's a sad blue river
Flowing by
It's filled with all the tears I cry
It keeps on flowing
Around the bend
Now it seems this river has no end

It runs from love
It runs from me
Searching for an ocean
Longing to be free
It runs from love
It runs from me
River of emotion
Sets my spirit free

It started when a teardrop
Left my eye
One thought of you and a lonely sigh
Memories of a love
Too hard to hold
Now my river of tears is running cold

It runs from love
It runs from me

Searching for an ocean
Longing to be free
It runs from love
It runs from me
River of emotion
Sets my spirit free

I'm gonna grab me a log, a leaf or a boat.
I'm gonna hold on tight to anything that'll float
I'm gonna take back the tears, gonna take back the pain
Let it all go like a warm gentle rain.

It'll flow from love
It'll flow from me
River of emotion
Sets my spirit free
It'll flow from love
It'll flow from me
River of emotion
Sets my spirit free

—*Georgann Stephens*

Blindsided

I am an average, middle class family man, have a college education, and a successful career. I have a son and a daughter born and raised in Lebanon, New Hampshire. I am your average father, coaching teams, attending recitals, and have been active in their classrooms and community.

I have experienced life's highs . . . the birth of my children, owning a home, wonderful family vacations, becoming a grandparent and also life's lows . . . a divorce, the loss of an infant son and I was diagnosed with cancer twelve years ago. But nothing prepared me for the events I and my family were thrust into on November 10, 2010.

On that night, I arrived home, after work, and was met by my wife; she had something to tell me. With tears in her eyes she said she had found an email my daughter had left open on her computer, to a friend describing how she had been sexually molested for years by her grandfather. When my wife confronted our daughter, she began to cry saying she didn't want to talk about it . . . it had happened for years but she didn't want to talk about it. The thought of my daughter being molested was numbing. I went into her room and asked her about the email . . . her response was "robotic," she kept her eyes glued to her homework and said she didn't want to talk about it. I had never seen her like this. She had always been engaging; we could talk about anything. I tried to hug her, she was stiff and had no response. My heart was broken. My little girl had been molested by her own grandfather . . . not some stranger lurking in the dark . . . but by a man whom I trusted. I could only tell her that I believed her . . . and that I loved her . . . it wasn't her fault. I returned to my bedroom and asked my wife if she had ever been molested by her father . . . she replied "I don't think so . . . but I don't remember." Those haunting words would be repeated by her three sisters as each was later told of our daughter's molestation.

I had to do something, I couldn't just sit by. Should I call him and ask what he had done, or should I drive to his home in Massachusetts to confront him? I needed to do something. I knew what I must do, I took my handgun and got in my car . . . I was going to kill the man that abused my daughter, it was as simple as

that. I needed to see my son. His apartment was just off the interstate, I needed to say goodbye.

I arrived at his apartment in tears. I told him what I had found out. I asked if that monster had ever molested or touched him. He said no. I wanted him to know I loved him and was so proud of him. I had one request, I would need him to take care of his sister. He pleaded with me not to go, saying my daughter needed me. Killing her molester, would cause more damage. He told me I needed to be strong, act like the man I had taught him to be. . . .“Act like the man I had taught him to be” . . . those words were so powerful. He held me, told me we were in this together. That night my son saved my life.

No one slept that night, my worst fears played out over and over in my mind . . . how would my daughter be affected, would she ever heal . . . how do we get her help? Where do I find help? I looked for a list of counselors in the area but where do you start? I found an emergency number to call. I called it, told the operator I needed help . . . I had just learned that my daughter had been sexually molested and I needed to get her in to see someone . . . now. She gave me a number to call said they could help me find local resources. I thought I was just getting a song and dance but I didn't have any other choice . . . I called the number and spoke with a counselor. I was able to meet with him at 9 am that morning.

I immediately started telling him all I knew. My 15-year-old daughter had told us that she has been sexually assaulted for years by her grandfather. To my surprise he immediately told me that he would need to report this to the police. I thought I was there to just talk to someone, not to get the police involved. He explained that by law any report of sexual abuse of a minor must be reported to the police. The laws are meant to protect children. He allowed me to spill my guts . . . cry . . . scream . . . become angry . . . become depressed . . . describe how I thought the bastard should die. He listened and didn't judge me. He said we need to focus on my daughter and my wife and I. He would start the process of finding counselors we could meet with. I had been heard, I just needed to hang in there.

I called my friend, a local police officer, and told him we needed to talk. I blurted out my daughter had been molested. I was so embarrassed, this was my best friend. He knew my daughter and treated her like his own daughter. When we met

I was surprised by his control and his methodical approach and questioning. He handed me a notebook and said it would be important to keep notes of everything that had and would happen.

I now needed to know if this monster had molested any of his other grandchildren. We contact my wife's three sisters and told them about what our daughter had said. Following this conversation, the granddaughter 5 years older than my daughter, said he had also molested her for many years. He told that if she said anything, no one would believe her and she would disappoint her parents. The other siblings did not want to ask their young children.

Who was this monster that assaulted our daughter, his own granddaughter? This monster is named Anthony. He was seventy-eight years old now, a father of five children and the patriarch of a large extended Italian family. He faithfully attended church, was a pillar of his community and was known by everyone in the town he grew up in and raised his family. Anthony always made sure the extended family got together every Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. He had family parties at his home, had an above-ground pool, rented bouncy tents for the children and was always the costumed Santa and Easter bunny at the family gatherings. Anthony was the problem-solver for the extended family. Whether it was an uncle with an alcohol problem, his wife's sister who had been physically abused, or a niece or nephew hitting a rough spot in life, he was the go-to guy. He was the ultimate father, high moral ethics, a hard worker, basically the greatest man alive. The reality, however was that Anthony was a pedophile, a wolf in sheep's clothing. I had been blindsided.

Through the Child Advocacy Center we connected with a child psychologist that we could meet with that week. We met as a family for the initial appointment. My wife and I were told that we had already done some of the most important therapy... we believed our daughter... we never questioned the validity of her disclosure. This was going to be a long process, over many months, with weekly sessions involving my wife and me alone, our daughter alone and then as a family. She assured us that we had taken the right steps, we were not alone and we would all get through this.

We were contacted by Child Protective Services who asked if the perpetrator still had contact with our child. He no longer did, in fact he actually lived in another

state. A home visit needed to be set up to meet us later that day. This meeting was brief, I think she just wanted to evaluate our home environment and see our daughter. My wife and I were interviewed by the police and pictures of furniture and living spaces were taken inside our home. Our daughter was interviewed at the Child Advocacy Center by a specially trained investigator. A member from WISE sat with my wife and me while our daughter was interviewed. Behind a two-way mirror, representatives from law enforcement and the County Attorney's office observed the interview. Following the interview my wife and I were able to meet with the entire team . . . I will never forget the look in their eyes . . . they had just witnessed a young girl describing detestable events. The legal process had begun. The police set up a time to interview Anthony in his home. However, the day before the interview, Anthony's wife called and said they had contacted an attorney and would not be speaking with the police.

In March 2011 the case was brought before the Grand Jury and he was indicted on three felonies and one misdemeanor. His attorney posted his bail, Anthony never appeared before a judge or had contact with any law enforcement agency. Anthony and his extended family holed up, stopping all communication with our family.

During the next months Anthony's plea offer was presented by Anthony's attorney, asking that he receive one year in the county jail and be required to get therapy. For this he would plead guilty to only a misdemeanor. We presented the deal to our daughter with the thought that he was admitting to his crimes and that she wouldn't have to go through a trial. Her answer was firm and immediate . . . absolutely not . . . why should he get a deal when she had to endure his molestation for years. A trial was scheduled for September but in August we were told that he had a "medical condition" that required treatment . . . the trial was postponed. Another trial date was then set for December . . . he was now going to have cataract surgery . . . trial postponed. I wrote letters to the Governor, our U.S. Senators, and local N.H. representatives asking that our case be looked into. The reasons for postponement were ridiculous. I went to the County Attorney's office and asked what was going on . . . I was frustrated. This animal had harmed our daughter, was indicted by a Grand Jury, but was living in his home as if he had no problems in the world. He was never fingerprinted, photographed or inconvenienced in any way . . . how could

this be? My daughter is going to weekly counseling, I had to change jobs, our world was upside down. I threatened to go to the newspapers, put up posters in his town, start making his life a little uncomfortable. I was told that anything I did could negatively affect the trial . . . I needed to hang in there for my daughter.

Finally, we received a court date for March 2012. In February, we met with the County Attorney and Victim Advocate to go over the trial process. They brought us to the empty courtroom to become familiar with this dark, foreboding place. They showed us where we would sit to testify, where the jury would sit and where Anthony would be seated. We talked about how we would enter the courthouse, our demeanor, they showed us the room where we would gather and wait during the trial. Her mother and I were considered witnesses, so we would not be allowed in the courtroom. We needed to discuss who would be in the courtroom for our side. Reality was slamming us in the face, the time I had pushed for was here.

On the first day of the trial we spent the morning together in our room. Word was coming from the courtroom that Anthony's attorney was arguing every point related to testimony. Finally, that afternoon my wife and I were called to the courtroom for our testimonies. As I entered the dark courtroom I was focused on where to sit. The judge was three feet to my right and the jury was six feet on my left. Off to the right I could see the monster surrounded in back by family members that I had known for twenty years. His attorney grilled me regarding the statement that I had made in a deposition with the police. To be honest the thirty minutes I testified are a blur. Court then recessed for the day.

The second day started like the first with the defense asking for a mistrial and arguing over what could be said in front of the jury. The teenager that received the original email testified that morning and we were told that our daughter would testify after lunch. She had selected her brother to be the only member of our family in the courtroom. However, Anthony's entire entourage would be there to hear her testimony. I remember walking her to the courtroom, holding it together until she and my son went in. At that point I came apart, I felt like I was offering up my daughter to that monster again. She was on the stand for what seemed like an eternity. After she was done court adjourned and we went home for the night.

The third and final day, my brother-in-law testified that Anthony had told him that he had acted inappropriately with our daughter and was sorry for his behavior. Following his testimony closing arguments from each side were heard. The jury was given the case to deliberate at noon. We were now waiting for the jury's verdict. Each day from our waiting room we could see Anthony and his two brothers going to their car to have a picnic lunch in the parking lot. That day another brother in law said "You would think they are planning their next golf outing." At 1:15 pm the courthouse intercom called our case back to the courtroom. Only an hour and a half . . . did something go wrong . . . what was next? My wife, son, daughter and I were seated in the front row along with the Victim Advocate. I noticed more Sheriff's deputies entering the courtroom placing themselves between our side and Anthony's. As the jury filed into the courtroom an overwhelming feeling of doom came over me, a verdict must have been reached. Anthony was ordered to stand and the court bailiff read the first charge of felonious aggravated sexual assault . . . the verdict . . . GUILTY . . . I was overcome with a feeling of relief. I held my daughter and wife as the other charges were read. All guilty with the exception of the one misdemeanor. The defense requested the jury be polled individually . . . each answered GUILTY. The jury was dismissed and the monster was handcuffed, bail was rescinded and the monster was taken off to jail. We had won. I was so pleased for my daughter but also sad for my wife and her sisters.

Five weeks later Anthony appeared for sentencing. Wearing the same dapper suit he left the trial in, but this time he was handcuffed. His family members wrote letters to the court exalting his wonderful deeds throughout life and suggested that somehow these deeds should give him a free pass. His wife, brother and son addressed the court asking for leniency, citing he was elderly and this would be a death sentence. My wife and I address the judge. I spoke about how I felt I had let my daughter down . . . I should have been able to protect her . . . I made sure that Anthony knew he would be forever known as a pedophile . . . I ended my statement telling my daughter how proud of her I was . . . she was my hero . . . she had faced this demon and would go on to do great things.

Anthony received 7.5 to 15 years in state prison. This is where he sits today. My wife's mother and extended family still support Anthony and feel that my daughter

and I fabricated everything.

How did this all affect my daughter? She showed me her college application essay recently, this is a portion of it.

“There I was, sitting in a room full of strangers telling them my darkest secret; a nightmare come true. I was completely numb. I was saying things that I had never told to anyone and the person that had done these unspeakable things was sitting across the room. What gave me the strength to talk that day was my brother. He sat by himself in support of me. In that room full of people who opposed or didn’t believe me, he was my hope. He was the one positive in a room full of negativity. He sat and listened and never looked away from me, no matter how painful it was for him. His eyes told me that I was loved and that our family would make it through. He urged me to continue and told me that I was strong enough to break free from the burden of a secret life I had lived for too long. After an hour of interrogation they released me from the hell that was that courtroom and I was finally free. I had told the world my story and I was no longer fettered by the pain of my past and all of its lies.

Today, I am proud to say that the man I called my grandfather is sitting in jail serving the maximum sentence for what he did to me. The family members that supported me have grown closer than ever before and are my true family. Everyone involved in this period of my life has been forever changed. For me, this experience made all the difference. I am sitting here today unafraid to tell my story. The sound of my keyboard, a constant reminder that I am getting closer and closer to my future. Looking back I realize how far I’ve come from the shy girl I used to be to the confident and outgoing young woman that I am today. I have learned the meaning of courage and strength and how to stand up for myself. Now, I am able to become the woman that I have always wanted to be. I am ready for my next chapter to begin and my new adventure to start.”

I am more . . .

I am more than the little girl whose uncle stole her innocence 50 years ago when she learned to keep the secret . . .

I am more than the young woman who was brutally raped at gunpoint by her boyfriend during a time when no domestic violence laws existed . . .

I am more than a young woman who was inappropriately touched and kissed by a pastor she trusted to help her . . .

I am more than the wife nearly choked to death by her husband in front of her 5-year old daughter . . .

I am more than a teacher assaulted at work by the grandfather of one of her students . . .

I am more than the woman abducted, at knifepoint, and then violently raped . . .

I am more than a grandmother who was assaulted in her home by an unknown assailant . . .

I am so much more than a victim of abuse.

I am no longer a scared little child who felt she wasn't worth being loved . . .

I am no longer a doormat for men to stomp all over and use and abuse at their will . . .

I am no longer the woman that people in power made feel ashamed when they didn't believe her . . .

I am more . . . so much more . . .

I am a strong, confident woman who will no longer be made to feel that each abuse was her fault when it wasn't . . .

I am a determined woman who will live a life without the fear of being abused . . .

I am a courageous woman who will speak up when there is injustice . . .

I am a feisty NaNa who will now be able to enjoy time with her grandsons . . .

And I am empowered and free to become the woman that
God intended me to be . . .
I am more than I ever dreamed that I could be for the secrets hidden in that box
deep inside me have been set free.
I am so much more!
So much more!

—*Melanie Devoid*

With gratitude –

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