

Child Sexual Abuse in Indian Country
Understanding the Trauma of Sexual Abuse of American Indian Children
Barbara Graham Bettelyoun, Ph.D. - Buffalo Star People Nonprofit

Gratitude

It is with great esteem and gratitude to President Obama, Attorney General Eric Holder, and members of the Task Force Advisory Committee that I offer this written testimony on the immediate and lifelong effects of childhood sexual abuse in Indian Country. For one who has been working in the trenches on these issues for decades, the focus of your inquiry brings a breath of hope and renewed motivation, for which I am deeply grateful. I am honored to be called upon to serve in this educational capacity and extend my willingness for future service as well.

Courage

This will be a difficult discussion to take in, and that is as it should be. Childhood sexual abuse is often referred to as an “unspeakable” crime because the pain and terror of the assault upon the body and spirit of a child is graphic and terrifying in nature and consequently, extremely unpleasant to hear about. I ask for your courage and patience as I lay out what I have learned from my education, and more importantly, from the life stories that brave men and women and children have shared with me through my years of working with survivors. I want to acknowledge them here and thank them for the honor of their trust through countless courageous conversations.

Warning

Because the incidence of childhood sexual abuse is so high across Indian Country (in 2008, Lisa Dillon, Health Director for the Oglala Sioux’s Pine Ridge Tribal Health Programs, estimated that 95-98% of the enrolled population had experienced childhood sexual abuse), it is likely that some readers of this document will be survivors themselves. For the safety of readers, I indicate sections throughout this document that are potentially triggering with the warning, “*Warning - Possible Trigger*”.

Introduction to the Problem

Problem-focused statistics document disparities between our health/wellness and that of non-Indians in the US. These include higher rates of suicide, alcoholism, unemployment, chemical addiction, poverty, school drop-outs, violence, child abuse, depression, cancers, and diabetes. While millions of program dollars regularly pour into our reservations to treat each of the symptoms above, why are results lacking and why are programs unsustainable once funding ceases? Buffalo Star People have observed two main reasons for this -- lack of relevance and lack of local capacity.

Reservation-based, grant-funded programs are often unsustainable for several reasons: 1) they do not target the root causes; 2) they rely on non-Native professionals who are difficult to recruit, impossible to retain, and unfamiliar with the culture; 3) due to difficulty in recruiting professional staff, under-qualified local nonprofessionals are often hired for positions for which they have inadequate training or experience; and 4) they are culturally irrelevant.

Programs focus on symptoms because the root problem is *unspeakable*. It is frightening to speak about the real problem because the answers are difficult and complex. Keeping the secret of child abuse has caused the unspeakable root problem to spin out of control and now it is occurring in epidemic proportions among our people.

Unaddressed childhood trauma is the genesis of a multitude of symptoms in Indian Country that have become epidemic. Millions of dollars in program spending have been aimed at treating its symptoms with little success. Chemical abuse and addictions; domestic violence; depression; suicide; anxiety; rage; post-traumatic stress; high educational drop-out rates; relationship difficulties; lack of parental involvement; cultural and spiritual disconnection; unemployment; lack of employee professionalism; accountability issues; elder abuse – these can all be related to lifelong and intergenerational effects of child abuse. Until we come to understand children's experience of sexual abuse and how that trauma's symptoms continue to affect victims throughout their lifetime, the cycle of abuse will continue and these symptoms will go on unchecked.

To understand the trauma of sexual abuse of American Indian children, we must come to understand the child's experience of sexual abuse and how untreated symptoms can continue to affect their emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual lives throughout adulthood. These are complex issues that are critical to understand if we are ever to galvanize the resources it will take to prevent and treat the horrific and long-lasting effects of this type of trauma across Indian Country.

Further, it is essential to keep in mind the dynamics of relationships to realize that when individuals suffer this type of trauma, the unhealed trauma symptoms infect all of their relationships -- the more intimate the relationship, the greater the impact. As Indian people we recognize this relationship dynamic as one of our basic tenants: *Mitakuye Oyasin -- we are all related*. It is this understanding that explains how marriages, offspring, families, communities, economies and our nations are suffering in epidemic proportion from the untreated effects of child abuse. If we have not suffered it ourselves, we have suffered it indirectly through our relationships with adult victims whose pain continues as they struggle with issues of emotional and physical intimacy, insecurities, depression and rage.

The Trauma of Childhood Sexual Abuse/Historical Trauma/Cycles

The intergenerational cycle of child sexual abuse has been allowed to spin out of control because we have yet to come to a clear understanding that, like cancerous cells, abuse begets abuse. ***Sexual abuse is a learned behavior.*** Studies consistently report that over 60% of *convicted* child abuse offenders *disclose* having been sexually abused as children. Because most children who

experience sexual abuse never report the crime, and because males report even less often than females, even when in adulthood, this 60% figure is likely an extremely low number.

Generally, much of how you parent is shaped by how you were parented yourself. There are things you do in the same way because you see them as correct, or wise, or because they're the only way you know. Our parents are the parents we know best and the departure point from which all our parenting journeys begin.

Unfortunately, Indian people carry the legacy of trauma that our generations suffered. The US policies of attempted genocide carried out in the late 1800s – the systematic rape and humiliation of Native women as a strategy of subjugation – these traumas still lie within the memories of our people. The generation of people who passed on the experience of these atrocities through their own personal stories, have not been buried that many years ago.

That our religious freedom was not won until 1978 alone could explain our people's lack of trust. Experiences of discrimination manifest in distrust of non-Natives, of the US government, and of its agencies. Not only that, but because our spiritual lives were forced underground for fear of outside interference and possible imprisonment, many families lost their rich connection to spiritual beliefs that had provided meaning and the ability to cope. Divested of the most basic spiritual teachings to understand why bad things happen to good people and to understand our purpose on Mother Earth, the traumatic histories of our people were left to fester and live within our people.

As if this legacy was not traumatic enough, the policy of forced assimilation by removing Indian children from their homes and sending them away boarding schools was meant to be the last nail in the coffin. Every Indian today has heard horror stories of the boarding schools. Children were snatched away from their parents, homes, and everything they knew, stripped of their cultural identities and treated harshly. Many children died from physical abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse. Even today, men in their fifties are just coming out with stories of the sexual and physical abuse they suffered in boarding schools. My own family carries these memories.

Warning - Possible Trigger

My adopted relative, I will call him my brother, was beaten and raped repeatedly by staff at boarding school. When he refused to cry over his own humiliations, his brother was summoned and he was made to watch as his younger brother was sodomized and beaten. It has taken him this many years to disclose his abuse. His own life has been filled with attempts to forget the memories of torture and pain, humiliation, and guilt that he was not strong enough to intercede for his little brother. His younger brother took his own life before he reached the age of thirty. My brother carries that as if it is his own guilt.

When the alcohol no longer numbed his pain, my brother turned to drugs. He suffered in silence for fifty years, but through that silence his rage was expressed indirectly to his wife and to his children, all of whom are estranged from him now, tertiary victims of his original childhood trauma.

At times my brother was helpless to shield his family from the pain and rage he worked so hard to cover. He threw it in sharp, angry words at his wife, and at his children. At times it came out in a shove, in a slap. He drank to numb the pain, to pass out, to sleep. For short periods of time it worked, and he would become dead even to himself. At times it worked so well that he could no longer bear the isolation of feeling numb to his wife's loving touch, her gentle words, and his children's laughter.

To feel again, he would pick fights in bars, begging for someone to beat him. Feeling pain would be better than feeling numb. At times he cut himself, digging deep into his skin with a knife or a stick or rock. Seeing the blood reminded him that he was still alive.

I am not condoning my brother's violent outbursts, and he knows this. He is a man and as a man he has choices to make. As I testified earlier, these are complex issues and we must take the time to examine them as such. Where could my brother have gone to get the help he needed to heal from his childhood trauma, the guilt and shame he carried from another's actions? IHS? He does not trust the interns or new doctors who cycle through long enough to pay off their school loans. He does not trust the faces that know nothing of our culture, our history, our traumatic legacy and whose relatives perhaps helped institute the very policies under which he suffered. How could they ever know the personal hell he experiences?

His children now carry that historical trauma into their own lives. Some of them continue the cycle. They are adults now who have witnessed and experienced violence in their childhoods. They grew up with a father who was not always able to be emotionally present, and who violently mistreated their mother at times. The boys share their father's legacy – they feel the rage and guilt of feeling too small to intercede on their mother's behalf. The girls have been given a model of what *normal* marital relationships are like. Their set-point for tolerating violence is one that allows them to suffer violence in their own relationships as adults.

Historical trauma and the lack of healing strategies are responsible for the cycle of violence continuing. Sadly, the historical traumas of attempted genocide and cultural assimilation are being perpetuated today by our own, upon our own. More than 90% of juvenile sexual abuse victims know their perpetrator/s in some way. Sexual abuse of children is learned behavior. Fully 60% of child victims are abused by adolescents who learned this behavior by having been abused themselves. At least 30% of all child sexual abuse victims will grow into adults who abuse children, because that is what they have been taught, and this continues the cycle.

And what about those victims who do not grow up to abuse children? They often suffer its effects for the rest of their lives. The statistics below show the devastating effects of abuse on a person's life.

- About 80% of 21 year olds that were abused as children met criteria for at least one psychological disorder.
- 14% of all men in prison in the USA were abused as children.
- 36% of all women in prison were abused as children.

- Children who experience child abuse & neglect are 59% more likely to be arrested as a juvenile, 28% more likely to be arrested as an adult, and 30% more likely to commit violent crime.
- Abused children are 25% more likely to experience teen pregnancy.
- Abused teens are less likely to practice safe sex, putting them at greater risk for STDs.
- Children whose parents abuse alcohol and other drugs are three times more likely to be abused and more than four times more likely to be neglected than children from non-abusing families.
- As many as two-thirds of the people in treatment for drug abuse reported being abused as children.

National studies consistently cite an increased rate of suicide attempts by adolescent and adult child abuse victims. **Consider this fact: *Suicide is the second leading cause of death among American Indians and Alaska Natives aged 15 to 34 years.***

These statistics, staggering as they are, are only the tip of the iceberg because of severe under-reporting. Fully 80% of adults who disclose that they were abused as children, also report that when they were children, they never told anyone about the abuse.

A Child's Experience of Sexual Abuse

Learning the effects of sexual abuse on a child, particular vulnerabilities to Native children, and the possible long-term effects throughout her/his life, can be accomplished by reading a list of possible symptoms and I will provide that in the language of psychology, or "academes". To truly understand how those symptoms manifest in one's life, we must ask the sufferers to teach us. Deep understanding comes from hearing the stories of survivors.

I offer my deep appreciation, compassion, and respect for the writer of the story that I also provide for your edification, following the "academes" sections. This story is written as a letter to Native people and is marked by a trigger warning. I know it must have taken this man a great deal of courage to write about his abuse experiences as a child, the effects of that abuse on his life, and his continuing daily struggles to survive that abuse. And I thank him for the altruistic sacrifice it took to write about it.

Keep in mind two staggering facts from research on convicted child molesters:

- 1) **On average, molesters hurt 112 children before they are caught.**
- 2) **On average, they molest each child repeatedly over the span of two years.**

Indigenous Children's Unique Vulnerabilities: In the Language of Academes

- Isolation – either geographic or cultural
- Lack of systems in place – Child Advocacy Centers, Social Services, Culturally appropriate *COMMUNITY* response strategies.

- Lack trained professionals – Child Clinical Psychologists, medical staff specializing in child trauma treatments.
- Lack of non-offending caregiver supports (non-offending caregivers often relive their own unhealed trauma when children disclose abuse and cannot be emotionally available to their children, lack of education about the signs of abuse, lack of understanding about appropriate child-adult boundaries, education is needed to understand links between difficulties parents experience and their own unhealed childhood traumas).
- Lack of housing increases the number of family members under one roof. 84% of sexual victimization of children *under age 12* occurs in a residence.
- Spiritual “Healers” commit abuse, too. Cultural societies that were once in place to oversee the protection of the community need to be brought back.
- Medicine men and women do not possess the knowledge needed to heal victims of child sexual abuse. Spirituality is a necessary component of healing, but spirituality and ceremony alone are not enough. It needs to be coupled with cultural education and western coping/healing strategies.
- Lack of appropriately trained program staff.
- Mistrust of non-Indians
- Lack of judicial systems/appropriately trained judicial staff/culturally-appropriate strategies to protect children/ prevent future victimization of the victim/deal with offenders.
- Youth with physical, emotional, or cognitive disabilities are over three times more at risk for child sexual abuse than their non-disabled peers, and may not be able to disclose to a trusted adult because of a disability which impairs communication. Prevalence of FAS/FAE in Indian Country.

Considering the problem-focused research on our Native communities, we know that the following vulnerabilities may also apply:

- In low-income families dependent on a sole breadwinner, such as a single mother, youth victims as well as adult witnesses may be reluctant to disclose sexual abuse for fear that the sole earner of income will be removed from the household.

- In communities of color in the U.S., long histories of distrust toward social welfare and law enforcement agencies may hinder the willingness of youth or adults to disclose child sexual abuse, or report suspected sexual abuse, to authorities. Racial and ethnic communities with historical experiences of discrimination stigma may be concerned that "airing dirty laundry" around the prevalence of child sexual abuse in their community could result in outsiders' invoking such information to justify further discriminatory treatment.
- Youth are at higher risk for child sexual abuse if they live in households characterized by instability, interpersonal conflict, and other forms of abuse.
- Children who live with only one parent are at elevated risk of child sexual abuse, particularly by males who are sexually involved with the mothers but not fully part of the household.
- Youth who have experienced child sexual abuse are also more likely to have witnessed violence at home or experienced other forms of physical or emotional abuse at home.

Effect of Sexual Abuse upon a Child: In the Language of Academes

Child victims of sexual abuse can suffer a range of psychological and behavioral problems, from mild to severe, in both the short and long term. Typically these include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Fear
- Sexual dysfunction
- Withdrawal
- Acting out

Victims of sexual abuse may also develop fear and anxiety regarding the opposite sex and may display inappropriate sexual behavior. However, the strongest indication that a child has been sexually abused is inappropriate sexual knowledge, sexual interest, and sexual acting out by that child.

Immediate or short-term effects of abuse usually occur within two years of the *termination* of the abuse. Effects vary depending upon the circumstances of the abuse and the child's developmental stage but may include regressive behaviors (such as a return to thumb-sucking or bed-wetting), sleep disturbances, eating problems, behavior and/or performance problems at school, and nonparticipation in school and social activities.

Re-victimization is also common among people abused as children. Research has shown that child sexual abuse victims are more likely to be the victims of rape or to be involved in physically abusive relationships as adults.

Let us think about how each symptom on this laundry list can manifest in the lives of abused children. It will enable us to understand how child sexual abuse is related to suicide, alcoholism, unemployment, chemical addiction, poverty, school drop-outs, violence, child abuse, depression, cancers, diabetes (and all stress-related diseases including autoimmune deficiencies), and sexually transmitted infections.

Depression Inability to focus; hopelessness; sleep difficulties; inability to concentrate; feeling worthless; over or under-eating; psychosomatic pain; feeling guilty.

Anxiety Reliving the trauma, experiencing triggers of the trauma, avoidance of anything that might be related to the trauma or of having it triggered, dread of new situations or people, clinginess, mistrust of adults, inability to make sense of what has happened to them, doubting their reality (did this really happen to me?)
What was it exactly? Why is he doing this to me?)

Guilt for Egocentric, developmentally appropriate view of the world – taking the blame the abuse (I must have done something to deserve this, why did he pick ME?).

Fear Afraid of specific people, afraid of the dark, nightmares, fear of the abuse being discovered, of the abuser's threats being carried out, of being removed from the family home or being placed in foster care, that if it is discovered retribution will cause death or harm or imprisonment to a loved one, fear of it happening again, fear that if they tell they will not be believed or they will be blamed.

Sexual Confusion During adolescence as normal puberty developmental processes come onboard, confusion about one's sexual identity *may* arise (in boys- does this make me gay? in girls- men are abusive so I don't want to be around them sexually. Either- why am I attracted to kids?)

Withdrawal Inability to articulate one's true feelings and thoughts that have arisen from their abuse experiences children may avoid social contact; feeling weird, tainted, like they don't fit in; fear someone may be able to tell what has happened to them.

Acting out Aggressive behaviors; "acting out" on animals or small children their abuse Experiences; risk-taking behaviors;

Imagine having to carry on a normal child's life with friends, family, and at school, with the burden of this horrific secret and trying to act as if it did not happen. Children who are sexually abused often suffer learning and/or language difficulties and suffer the additional humiliation of being labeled. Furthermore, symptoms of abused children are often overlooked because adults mis-assign motivation to their behaviors: example - withdrawn children are labeled *shy*, anxious children who refuse to go to school may be seen as *willful*, and children who act out their rage may be viewed as *disobedient*. Based on observed symptoms alone, a child who acts out may be diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder or Conduct Disorder.

Lifelong Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse: In the Language of Academes

The negative effects of child sexual abuse can affect the victim for many years and into adulthood. Adults who were sexually abused as children commonly experience depression. High levels of anxiety can result in self-destructive behaviors, such as alcoholism or drug abuse, eating disorders, anxiety attacks, situation-specific anxiety disorders, obsessive use of pornography and/or sex, and insomnia. Many victims also encounter problems in their adult relationships and in their adult sexual functioning.

Many times survivors experience chronic anxiety, tension, anxiety attacks, and phobias (Briere & Runtz, 1988, as cited in Ratican, 1992). Survivors of sexual abuse may experience difficulty in establishing interpersonal relationships. Common relationship issues include difficulties with trust (jealousy, fear of the abuse being found out, insecurities, expecting trust to be betrayed), fear of intimacy (fear of being triggered, of revealed their "weirdness"), fear of being different or odd, difficulty establishing interpersonal boundaries (codependence), passive behaviors, and getting involved in abusive relationships (Ratican, 1992).

One horrific irony that adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse must grapple with is a love/hate relationship with human touch and intimacy. While everyone craves love, adult survivors can be inhibited, withdraw from or altogether avoid intimate relations because of any combination of the following symptoms:

- an inability to feel good about sexuality;
- sexual identity confusion;
- feeling used/dirty/tainted;
- reliving memories;
- an inability to explain negative emotions around sexual intimacy;
- mistrust in relationships (again – can look like jealousy);
- insecurity;
- emotional instability;
- shutting down/numbing;
- avoidance of intimate relationships;
- masking their feelings;
- feeling lost to themselves;

- codependence;
- intrusive memories;
- an inability to focus/concentrate/take in new information/remember;
- depression;
- self medication (food, drugs, alcohol, sex, porn, gambling, smoking); and
- suicidality.

Physical health conditions such as HIV or other STDs, unintended pregnancy, alcohol or other drug abuse, hypertension, and obesity are all reported with greater frequency among people who have experienced child sexual abuse.

Dissociation is a common feature among children who have been sexually abused and often carries into adulthood, especially during sexual encounters (even consensual ones). Dissociation is a way of coping with intense feelings of distress, including terror and rage, which usually stem from trauma. It is a feeling of being out of one's body, which may take several forms:

- Floating above oneself, as if watching from the outside.
- Total physical and/or emotional numbness.
- Taking on a different identity temporarily, with no memory of one's real identity (sometimes called multiple personalities).
- Imagining oneself to be in another place or time and totally losing touch with one's actual surroundings.

Medical Disorders That Can Result from Sexual Abuse

If memories of abuse are intense and interfere with one's life in significant ways, [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder](#) may be diagnosed. Depression, Anxiety, and some Personality Disorders (particularly if abuse is persistent and severe) are a possible outcome of physical abuse. [Dissociative Identity Disorder](#) (formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder) generally occurs only when there is a history of severe abuse.

Body issues and eating disorders have also been cited as a long-term effect of childhood sexual abuse. Ratican (1992) describes the symptoms of child sexual abuse survivors' body image problems to be related to feeling dirty or ugly, dissatisfaction with body or appearance, eating disorders, and obesity. As is well documented, Native populations suffer a higher prevalence rate of diabetes than the general population.

I will not take on a lengthy discussion about the mechanical links between trauma and stress-related diseases. It would take a primer in endocrinology and neurobiology to explain that trauma causes elevated levels of cortisol which leads to our bodies' stress reaction and the breakdown of tissues and functions in the body. The more prolonged the feelings of stress (as in long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse), the bigger the impact on our bodies and the more incidences of heart disease, cancers, diabetes, autoimmune diseases, etc.

Lifelong Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse: In the Language of A Victim

Warning - Possible Trigger

What follows is a letter, written at my request, by a Native elder and personal friend. He wrote it to help our People understand the effects of sexual abuse on a boy child and how those effects can still be felt decades later. He wants to answer the question Native women often ask, "Where are our men?!" I offer my deepest respect and thanks for the courage and sacrifice it took for him to share and write this story.

I woke up this morning having to figure out who I am going to be today. Am I going to be heterosexual, homosexual, transgender, transsexual or some other sexual orientation? I have to do this every day. I did not get to have a choice in my sexual preference as an adult, this was made for me when I was a child. As an adult, I must choose to be who I am, because of the choices I didn't get to have as a child. Nothing developed naturally for me. It was forced upon me.

I don't remember my life without these feelings. I don't remember my life without the sexual attraction to women, to men or absorbed by sex itself.

I am an adult Native American male survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

I know I must write this letter because I am healthy enough to do so. Many of my brothers are too unhealthy to speak yet. But more so, I want to help those that are hurting and suffering from the pain of childhood sexual abuse and help the loved ones around them to understand what we go through every day of our existence. I am now 51 years into my walk on Mother Earth. For 47 of those years I have either been abused or dealing with the shrapnel that is the legacy of child sexual abuse.

Many women in our Native communities are asking, "Where are our men?" I hope this letter will shed some light on that question. This is my story to my people.

I learned about grooming at the innocent age of four. Charlie was a barber who lived in the basement apartment below us. My family and I lived in Rapid City. I was born in the Black Hills. In the heart beat of our home land. Charlie was a kind and gentle man. He liked me and treated me well. He would invite me down to his apartment below my family home, talk to me, feed me and play games with me. I especially liked the cookies he would buy for me. He would always ask which ones were my favorites. I would let him know and he would make sure the next time I came down to have them on his kitchen table.

I started to love Charlie. I would make sure I was playing outside at the time he should be coming home from work. I could feel him coming from downtown and I would get excited. My body would tingle with joy in anticipation of seeing him walking home. When he saw me, a smile would come over him. His eyes lit up when he saw me. I knew he cared. Sometimes I

would run into his arms. He would catch me and swing me around, all the time I would be laughing and screaming all at the same time.

He spent a lot of time with me. I felt very special and he made sure I was taken care of so I was happy. If I was sad he would tickle me or make funny faces. He would make sure I felt good. I started to Love him even more.

My mother and father didn't get along that well. There was screaming and yelling and sometimes my dad didn't come home. It didn't feel good sometimes to be there when things like this were happening. It wasn't like that all the time. We had a lot of fun too, especially my sister and me. We would go to Pine Ridge to be with my relatives or into the Black Hills for picnics or go looking for pop bottles in the ditches along the gravel roads. I remember good times too. But the yelling and fighting between them got worse and worse.

Charlie became someone who I wanted to be around more than my dad and mom. He was very much like my grandfather. Grandpa was so kind and gentle to me. He treated me like I was the most special person in the world. He made laugh and I know he loved me very much. He took me with him to the store or when he went walking downtown. My younger sister and I would stay with him and Grandma during summers or for short times during the year. That is when they didn't live by us. When they were living by us, they would take us with them, as much as they could. Grandpa had that sparkle in his eye when he would see me.

Just like Charlie.

On the day of my 6th birthday, I was outside waiting for Charlie, like I usually did. I was full of anticipation, because Charlie told me he had a special gift for me on this special day of mine. My mom was making my cake and getting ready for my birthday celebration tonight when my dad got home from work.

Charlie came walking down the street and I looked up and saw him. I got up and stood and waited. My heart pounded with excitement. I looked him in the eyes as he got closer. But there was no sparkle. He was not smiling. When he got to me he took me by the hand and asked if I wanted my present. Of course I did! I had been waiting all day for it! So he led me down the stairway to his apartment. There was a glow coming from inside.

When he opened the door, I dashed in and stood in the middle of the room waiting for my present. He told me it was in his bedroom. His apartment consisted of a living room that flowed into a kitchen, a bathroom and his bedroom. I thought it was huge. But I was a child, what did I know. So, I went into his bedroom and stood by his bed.

He came in and told me that this was a special present. A present between people who love each other. I was so excited. I could barely stand it! He took my hand and told me he loved me. I had always felt that, but this is the first time he had ever told me.

He took off my shirt and told me to take the rest of my clothes off. It all happened so fast. I was confused and my excitement started to dissolve. He told me to get on the bed. But I couldn't. I froze. He lifted me up and threw me on the bed. He turned me over on my stomach. I was scared. My heart was once again pounding, now for a different reason.

I could hear my sisters and mom upstairs, laughing and talking. They were playing music on the radio.

I heard Charlie undressing. I was having a hard time focusing. He put something on my bottom...and then the most unimaginable pain I have ever experienced rocketed through my whole being. He was in me. He was molesting me. It hurt so bad. I started to cry and he covered my mouth. I wanted to scream, but he forced it back down. Every movement was more and more painful. I could still hear my sisters and mom. I focused on them the best I could. I focused on the music...as he covered my mouth and tears running down my face, he said 'if you ever tell anyone, you will never see your family again'. I love my family. I love my family. His breath smelled of alcohol, just like my dad's. I could smell everything around me. The smell was so intense.

His body was so heavy I could barely breath. I thought I was dying.

So this is love.

He finished. With an evil I had never heard he told me again not to tell. The one time was enough, the second I would not dare go against. So many things were racing through my six year old mind. The only things I knew were from a place of love. I was six. All I knew the world to be was good and love and sometimes people yell and scream. But they come back to being nice and gentle and touch you with kindness.

I struggled to my feet. Charlie cleaned up the blood and mess and helped me get dressed. I had a hard time walking, especially up that dark stairway that led out of his apartment. I got on my bicycle and peddled to the jungle, never once sitting down. The jungle was a place where my friends and I went to climb trees and goof around. I don't know how long I was there, but long enough to be able to go home without anybody knowing what happened.

I walked into my house and everyone yelled "Surprise!" I looked around and saw the decorations, the meal and the cake. I saw the happiness before me. I smiled the best I could, wondering in the back of my mind, what presents I would get from them. It was a good party. I came back to me. I loved my presents and the cake.

This was my 6th year on Mother Earth. In fact, this was the 6th year, on the 6th day of March. This was my Golden Birthday.

I have had a deep love and a deep hate for Charlie, depending on any particular moment or feeling or smell that would trigger me. Charlie went on to abuse me, torture me and love me all

at the same time for the next several years. Up until we moved to Wagner. I thought I was free. Wishful thinking. In fact, Charlie sent me gifts on my birthdays in Wagner. I never opened any of them. He and his wife came to visit my family in Wagner once. By this time the memories had been repressed into the back of my mind. When they got to our house, he said hi to my mom and took me aside. The first thing out of his mouth wasn't 'Hi' or 'It's good to see you'. But instead it was, 'Remember when you sat on my lap and I would get a boner and you would come into the bathroom and hold it for me'. The memories came flooding back.

I took off on my bike and road around all day until he and his wife left. I came home and my mom was furious. She said they came all this way to see you, what the hell is wrong with you. I told her what he said to me. For the first time I was telling someone. Someone who truly loved me.

She slapped my face and called me a 'f***ing liar'.

In an instant, all I knew was no longer true. Everything disappeared. Suddenly. The memories were gone, repressed. From that point on I would have to try to figure my life out on my own without access to memories to explain why I was feeling the way I felt. I could not take a chance on someone not believing me again. I was 15. I started to drink, use prescription medication (which I would steal from friends' houses) and bad behaviors followed.

When the memories repressed, I still felt abnormal. I didn't fit. I felt I didn't belong. Sometimes people would comment about me. I was crazy, weird and just strange. Yet, most of the time I was me. Gentle, kind, loving and caring for how others felt. I didn't know what or why this was happening. I thought it was because I was Indian or that my dad displayed the same behaviors, so I was going to be like him. I did not know why I acted the way I did.

I didn't know I had repressed memories.

I couldn't hold on to a good relationship. The bad ones felt more comfortable. I didn't know how unhealthy I was and did not understand why I acted out the way I did. I felt horrible about myself. I wanted to be a good person.

I don't know how I managed to do this, but I went to college and got a degree. I got married and had children. Before my first was born, a boy, I made a promise to myself. I promised I would be a good father. I knew I could do that.

My son turned 4- it was a trigger. Something started to change inside me. Slowly, I started to feel deep, dark ooze coming out of me. Over a period of months, I started to feel depressed and paranoid. More feelings started to come out and most were negative or bad. I still didn't know why, until I was outside and I smelt something in the air. CHARLIE.

The memories started to pour out of my mind. I was going crazy. I became deeply depressed, started drinking heavily and the use of drugs were a part of my daily routine. I wanted to die. I told the mother of my children at the time and she helped the best she could. I started to see therapist after therapist after therapist. I was hospitalized on more than one occasion for suicide, usually after I had an episode of cutting. Cutting was the only way I could feel sometimes. I was trying to feel something else besides the pain I was dealing with in my head, my heart, my spirit and the rest of my being. I had planned my suicide twice and tried to carry it out once, but was stopped. I wanted to end my life so badly, the pain was too much. The thought of this crossed my mind more than a few times in my life.

Drugs and alcohol were not the only things I used to self-medicate. Food, sex, pornography and exercising were also options that I frequently used.

Stories were starting to pour out and most were not complete. Some would take days, weeks or months to completely come out from beginning to end. There were a few that took a year or more to completely come out fully. Unfortunately, the stories would not stop playing. I had a period of almost ten years that I did not sleep through the night because of nightmares and the stories. The stories would play all day and all night. Charlie was now in control, again.

The stories, as I call them, were flashbacks of the sexual abuse that happened to me as a child. The sexual exploitations of a child molester. I got to watch, inside my head, his deviant behavior over and over and over.

It was good to find the therapists I did. They got me to a good point in my life. I found one men's group in Minneapolis. This was the only group at the time that was helping men deal with sexual abuse. This group was my salvation. I could share with these men what had happened to me and they understood immediately, without judgment, without question. It was my only safe place.

During all of this, I was still a good father. I am proud of this. Unfortunately, my relationships didn't fare so well. I was divorced from the mother of my children and lost most of my friends. Those that stayed on have a hard time understanding my actions. Isolation and not communicating was my way of coping in this world. All through my life I have had difficulty in holding on to relationships, especially those that are intimate. Male and female relationships.

My days used to be filled with hundreds of triggers. Some I understood where they came from and what situation I was in, and some came and I would not fully understand until later. Some not at all.

What mattered is understanding what triggers were. Triggers were smells or tastes, or the way the wind blew. They could be the tone someone used in their voice or a word or phrase they said. The way the sun shone on a building or the darkness of the night. I will never know all of my triggers and that is okay. More important, is to process through them and let yourself feel

the emotions and express to someone those feelings and tell the story that comes with that trigger.

I was at a point in my life, nine years ago, that I wanted to be alone. I decided that I should be alone, that my weirdness and crazy behavior should not be shared with anyone else. I thought that I would be like my dad and drink myself into the grave. Better than hurting anyone else.

But I met a woman who would change my world and help me heal beyond what I ever imagined.

I told her I had been abused as a child and she did not run away. She had compassion for me and she loved me. Being married to me has been rough on her. She has seen me through heavy drinking, intense outbursts of rage, attacks on her character and her being, outbursts of anger at my children and her. But she continued to love me and have compassion for me. Slowly I grew to trust her and I began to tell her the stories. She listened.

I have tainted her life, as well as those around me with the things I went through as a child. My wife understands. She has helped my children understand, the best they can. She has given me the strength, courage and most of all the tools and understanding to help me heal further. But her life is not what she had expected, or hoped for, or deserved with me. It has tainted her life and my children's lives.

I still have the stories that play throughout my day. Not every day. I have healed in a way that I now have my life back. I am in control. Not Charlie. The one thing that my wife taught me and that carries into all that I do and all that I am is UNCONDITIONAL LOVE. What I was taught the moment Charlie started to groom me was Conditional Love. That conditional love was pounded into me and engrained so deeply that it became who I was, the way I felt and what I expected everything and everyone around me to be.

I started this letter with how I wake up in the morning. About two years ago, I got to share my rage with my wife. Not in a bad, indirect way. I got to talk about why I have had this enormous, black, evil rage inside of me. It has been my most shameful secret, one I intended to take with me all the way to my grave. I was triggered by something, I don't know what, but something. Thinking about this triggered my rage, for weeks. I tried to keep it inside, like I have all of most of my life. I first felt this rage when I was around 19 or 20. But I could not keep it inside any longer. I had to tell my wife. Because this was the rest of my life, the rest of her life.

We were sitting at a restaurant and I asked her if I could tell her something. I said it was about the rage she has experienced with me. She said yes. I told her this story is not new to me, but it is the first time I am sharing with any one. I told her I don't know who I am sexually normally, who I was born to be. I have never been fully comfortable with who I am and at times hated myself for thinking these thoughts or thinking there is something so wrong with me. It is the battle I deal with every day. All of my life. I told her I did not know who I am, if I am a man at all. Am I good enough? Am I crazy, weird and different from everyone else? In my life, the sexual confusion was taught through abuse. As a child, before I was even learning about

sexuality and preference, I was taught. This was not of my choosing, but it is part of me now. I told her this and she looked at me and knew what it took to tell her.

I now know that many of us who have been sexual abused as children have this part of us we don't talk about. I decided to start talking about it.

Another part of those that are sexually abused are those that are attracted to children because of their childhood abuse. Sixty percent of those that have been sexually abused will go on to sexually abuse children. I am thankful to Creator that I am not one of them. I got the opportunity to deal with that early on in my therapy. It isn't part of me, but I understand the unfairness and evil that was done to get to that place where children are in danger.

For those of who that don't cross that line, I honor you. You live in your own hell.

I had been living in my own hell for so long, I thought I didn't deserve to be me. Really didn't know how to begin to find me and who I really am. Telling my wife has given me this opportunity and released the rage.

Childhood sexual abuse is part of my daily existence. I will never know or remember my life without it. Yet, I have been able to make my life better. We are storytellers. This is my story. As my journey continues, I know that my healing will continue and my life will change the way I want it to change. All for good.

I have people in my life who truly understand the effects of childhood sexual abuse and I hope by writing this letter to my people it will help you understand and help those having trouble with alcohol, drugs, violence and suicide.

The victims, as well as their partners, families and friends need compassion, love and understanding. We need to have compassion for each other. There are some hard conversations we need to have.

So, you ask, "Where are our men?" I am here. I want to help my people heal.