



Friday, November 28 2014

Ad



She The People

'I feel whole.' After 30 years, a woman confronts her abuser — and herself



By **Danielle Bostick** November 13

Danielle Bostick (Photo by Trish Koch)

One afternoon two years ago, I received a flurry of texts, Facebook messages and phone calls that Rick Curl, a prominent swim coach in the same Washington, D.C., area league as my childhood team, had been arrested for sexual abuse of a minor that had occurred decades earlier.

While to my friends the story was little more than shocking gossip, it disturbed me in a different way. I felt unsettled, but wasn't sure why. The next year, as I was pursuing a new career in clinical mental health counseling, I was assigned to write the story of my life. Suspicious details, along with troubling memory gaps, helped me to eventually pinpoint why I had been so disturbed by the Curl story. As it turned

Advertisement

out, I had been the victim of a similar crime.

For nearly 30 years I'd been carrying a secret — one I'd kept from even myself.

In 1984, shortly after my parents got divorced, my swim coach and family friend, Christopher Huott, moved into my house under the guise of helping us, assuming many of the primary tasks of caregiving as my mom worked full-time and adjusted to single parenthood. He packed my lunches, provided transportation and entertained me with “Metroid,” “Tetris” and “The Legend of Zelda.” He introduced my family to the national parks, and chose Latin as my foreign language in middle school, which ended up being my college major.

He also [sexually abused me](#) from the ages of 7 to 12. As an 8-year-old, I remember worrying I could become pregnant by what my abuser was doing. At 9, I thought I would have to marry him.

Like some victims, I took years — decades actually — to come to grips with what happened to me. But unlike most, I ultimately came forward, reported the crime and allowed my name to be used in public court records and news accounts. It wasn't an easy decision, but there was a downside to silence. My sense of shame increased as I hid this part of me. And, as I learned, remaining nameless in the face of such a crime invites all manner of vicious speculation — from acquaintances and strangers alike — and potential exploitation a second time.

SPONSOR GENERATED CONTENT

Taming the polar vortex

The Most Popular All Over

TIME

IKEA Channels Apple in a Hilarious

By America's Natural Gas
Moving record gas supplies to New England can ease winter price swings.

READ MORE

The Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) reports that the vast majority of victims will never report their crimes to law enforcement. When they do, however, their willingness to engage with law enforcement is predicated on anonymity. In fact, 90 percent of victims of sexual assault would be less likely to report their crimes if their identities were publicly revealed during the legal process.

There are numerous reasons victims keep their abuse history a secret. “The victim’s post-rape circumstances are psychologically unique and not typically experienced by a victim of any other crime,” said Julaine Field, an associate professor at the University of Colorado and a licensed professional counselor. “Any choice to disclose is fraught with unwanted complications.”

It often feels safer for victims to deny or minimize the extent and impact of the abuse. Naming and disclosing the experience can dredge up intense emotional pain, shatter the identity a victim has worked hard to construct, threaten his or her sense of normalcy, and disrupt interpersonal relationships, particularly if the perpetrator is still in contact with the victim or his or her family.

I experienced all of this when confronting my own abuse history. I never told anyone — not my mother or father, not my younger brother or my friends — while the abuse was

Ad for Its New...

THE BALTIMORE SUN

Ravens punter Sam Koch ranks first in Pro Bowl fan...

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Alleged plot included bombing Arch, killing St...

Our Online Games

[Play right from this page](#)

Spider Solitaire

Genre(s): [Card](#)

Spider Solitaire is known as the king of all solitaire games!

52 card pickup

Genre(s): [Card](#)

Pick up cards as fast as you can!

Tri-Peaks Solitaire

Genre(s): [Card](#)

Reveal cards as you clear your way to the top!

Carniball

Genre(s): [Arcade](#)

This amusement park classic will bring back some joyous memories

Social Surface:
Politics

Sponsored By



Obama on GOP and immigration: "What they don't have the ability to do is expect me to stand by with a broken system in perpetuity."

@DavidNakamura 14d

Obama on press restrictions in China/Burma says "I've been blunt that societies that repress journalists ultimately

happening. I had contact with my perpetrator until 2012. Frantically burying memory fragments of the trauma and constructing an alternate reality had allowed me to do that. Cutting off contact would have been too close to facing what had happened. To protect myself and attempt to live a normal life, I had created a narrative of my childhood that was a lie.

Most adults can't remember every facet of their childhoods, but most of my memories stopped shortly after my perpetrator moved into my childhood home. Even recollections of benign experiences ended up locked in the same vault as the dark ones because of the pervasiveness of the abuse. Yet geographic distance from where the crimes took place, details of a crime similar to my own, and taking a deep look into what I remembered of my past triggered something in me I could not ignore. Although I would have preferred to lock up those memories again and move forward, I realized that continuing to keep the secret would be unhealthy for my family and me – I was now married with children of my own – and perhaps dangerous to the community where my perpetrator still had regular access to children because of his job as a swim coach.

When I decided to report my abuse, I had no specific memories of the assaults, which was very confusing. I did not know at that time that it is common for people to form and store memories of traumatic events very differently than non-traumatic ones. Although decades had passed since the crimes and I did not have linear, coherent accounts of the abuse, I was sure enough that it had happened to contact the Montgomery County police. I assumed, at best, I could tip the police off to a potential pedophile, and maybe corroborate the stories of other

...people say!"

@DavidNakamura 14d

Aung San Suu Kyi downplays rift with U.S.: "We may view things differently from time to time but that in no way affects our friendship."

@DavidNakamura 14d

victims whose memories might be clearer than mine. At worst, I thought they would tell me that too much time had elapsed, or that I did not have enough information. I was surprised when the detective encouraged me to make a report in person the next time I was in Maryland.

In March 2014, I walked into a Montgomery County police station with little more than memory fragments and a gut feeling that I had been abused. After reporting what I remembered, the detective suggested a phone sting. A recorder running, I called Chris from my cellphone, intent on discovering the truth, not just for the police's case but also for me. We had been in touch until I had left the Washington area in 2012, and he was pleasantly surprised to hear from me. I did not need a dramatic cover story. I told him the truth — that I remembered very little of my childhood, I had strong suspicions I had been abused, and that I needed him to fill in these gaps for me so I could move forward in my life. For nearly two hours, he confessed to abuse more horrifying than I had imagined or feared.

Suddenly, I was not just tipping the police off to a potential perpetrator, I was Victim A in a decades-old case.

Advertisement

I was still known only as a “36-year-old victim” when news of my case broke in the media. Reporting my crime to police had given me a voice, but it also made me a victim in new ways. Reactions to the news about Chris in the media were upsetting. One of the perpetrator's apologists wrote online, “(The accuser) should be ashamed of herself. I bet 10 to 1 she is in debt, has credit cards up the wahzoo, and

needs money.”

Vitriol was not limited to online fora. Even after Chris was banned from USA Swimming, the new owner of his Laurel, Md., team told some families the accuser was mentally unstable, seeking a scapegoat for her problems. Friends called to tell me this, not knowing that I was his victim and that Chris had confessed to the crimes. Also distressing, an organization in Massachusetts that purports to support children in athletics promoted itself on Twitter by claiming — falsely — to have helped my family and me in our quest for justice.

Who were the beneficiaries of my anonymity? An organization that was taking advantage of my misfortune. Supporters of my abuser who felt comfortable impugning the character of a nameless, faceless woman. Perhaps even perpetrators, the vast majority of whom will never face justice and who count on the voicelessness of their victims to shield themselves from the consequences of their actions.

I began to see advantages to coming forward beyond my closest friends and a few family members. In the same way friends and former teammates had contacted me in the wake of the Rick Curl case, I continued to receive a barrage of texts and calls to inform me of my coach’s misdeeds. The final, pivotal moment for me came when a former teammate called to let me know that people within the swim community were saying that I was the victim. It clicked: I realized I had done nothing shameful and I had no reason to hide.

Advertisement

On a personal level, disclosing this aspect of my life on a larger scale would give me a voice that had been silenced for nearly three decades. More generally, I hoped to destigmatize child sexual abuse, disrupt the culture of shame and silence associated with sex crime, and empower other victims to begin their journey of healing. In making this decision, I also let my children know the truth about my past.

I described the impact of my perpetrator's actions in court on Sept. 11, when he was [sentenced to 10 years in prison](#), and allowed the media to use my name and face in related coverage. I had constructed an identity born of a void. As I ascribed words to my experience after three decades of concealment and denial, it was as if I was speaking my abuse into existence and it became real. While my life no longer felt comfortable or normal, it felt authentic. I was no longer living a charade.

In the past two months, I have not once regretted my decision. Through my silence and shame, I was tacitly saying to my husband, "I don't trust you enough to love all of me." I was saying to others, "If you know this about me, you will reject me." Instead of the negative response I feared, I have been met with overwhelming love and affirmation. Victims of similar crimes have reached out to me in support and solidarity.

Every day I mourn the loss of the childhood in which my biggest source of sadness and confusion could have been my parents' divorce. I cannot go back and have a normal childhood, but in confronting the truth about my shattered childhood, I feel whole. In choosing to share my experience, my burden is lighter because I am not alone.

Advertisement

Danielle Bostick lives in Colorado Springs with her husband and children and is a psychotherapist at Pikes Peak Suicide Prevention. Follow her on Twitter [@danibostick](https://twitter.com/danibostick).