

LAURI'S STORY

When I was seven years old, my mother began a new relationship with a man. I still remember the details about him. He was a good looking man. Dare I even say handsome? He was funny, kind and family orientated. I remember he drove an old fashioned car. He and my mother got along very well. They seemed to have a great relationship. From the outside looking in, people would think we were a happy family. We did what normal families do; summer BBQ's, went to his family events, watched Saturday morning cartoons. I was happy. I liked him. Everything seemed to be going well.

I mention this because I want people to know... These sexual predators aren't **always** some creepy looking guy in a dark alley. This doesn't happen **only** to mothers who neglect their children. My mother was very attentive and loving and had no idea this was happening to me.

Looking back now, and knowing what I now know, I see that he was grooming me from the very beginning. He would buy me nice things. He even bought me a new puppy. And I later learned that he would specifically prey on single mothers with daughters - Mothers who would be financially dependent on him.

The sexual abuse began when I was 7 years old. I never told my mom, or anyone. I feared I would not be believed. I didn't know then that it was wrong. I thought that's just how things were. I was bullied as a kid but I still didn't tell anyone about the abuse at home because I thought it would get worse if I did tell and was not believed. I had a best friend and I thought that's all I needed in this world. It's hard enough growing up, but when you have this secret hanging over you and not knowing what is right or wrong it can be unbearable at times.

The abuse I experienced affected me throughout my life. Not just as a small child. As a teenager things just got worse. I was a very angry person. I was angry at home, school and towards people. I became

involved in an abusive relationship and just thought abuse was just a normal part of how life was. I spent time in and out of sexually, physically, verbally and mentally abusive relationships. When you've been abused since childhood you believe that's all you deserve. And so, I started drinking to fit in, and of course to hide the pain I was secretly carrying around with me for years. Finally, when I was 18 at the advice of my school counsellor, we decided it was time to say something. So I wrote a letter to my mom telling her what had happened to me when I was 7. I remember being terrified to give it to her. I wrote in the letter that I never wanted to talk about it again. My mom tried to get help for me but I *refused* to talk about it. My anger continued to grow inside me like a raging bull. I drank more to hide it.

Ordinary things would be reminders or triggers for me of the abuse I experienced. My childhood abuser drove a transport truck so every time I saw one I cringed. I would feel sick to my stomach. Something as simple as the smell of old spice was a trigger for me because that's what he wore. Certain foods that we ate together would make me sick to my stomach. The older I got my anger finally exploded and I became the abuser. This is not something I am proud of, but my anger would erupt and I would hit and then ask questions later. I was tired of being told what to do, tired of being bullied!! I drank to forget, to stop feeling. I drank when I was bored, sad, and happy. In 2013 I got a call from my mom saying a detective wanted to talk to me about what had happened to me when I was younger, because my abuser had been caught and confessed about what he did to me. I was in complete shock. I was scared. I felt sick. Despite my initial shock, I agreed to talk to the detective the next day. I felt it was time to break the silence after all this time. I wanted to do it for my daughter. The abuse I suffered affected me in so many ways throughout my life, including how I was as a parent. My daughter was born in August of 2011. She became my everything. Having her was the best feeling in the world. My daughter is the love of my life, and my greatest accomplishment.

But it was also very hard because I didn't want anything bad to happen to her. My anxiety really started to come out after she was born. She was living in a bubble because of me. I didn't let anyone watch her except my parents. I'd never let her attend sleepovers. I believe she has separation anxiety because of me.

When I got the call from the detective that day, I also got connected with Women In Crisis. With the help of WIC I'm learning to poke holes in my bubble. I'm learning how to heal and move forward in my life. On August 3rd 2015 I made a major life decision. I decided to go to an AA meeting. I was terrified. It meant I had to admit I had a problem. Not just to yourself, but to a room full of strangers. But I pushed myself to go, and it was the best decision I made. It didn't come easy. I feared I wouldn't be me! Would I still be liked? Would I be funny and still be fun to be around? But in my sobriety I found I am all of these things and more....I am still me, but I'm now the best version of myself. I am the best mother I can be for my daughter. I'm proud to say I will 2 years sober on August 3rd. I wanted to share my story today to BREAK the silence!!!! When we break the Silence we STOP them from being Predators! If I can overcome this, ANYONE can. I am a SURVIVOR! I have had many hurdles come my way in the last few years, and my fight is not over yet, but I now know my worth. I now know my strength and that I am capable of amazing things. I'm not sure where life is going to take me but I do know I will be doing it sober!

Thank You

~Lauri