Why I Didn’t Tell

October 5, 2018 By Aundaray Guess

As you read this blog, the circus involving Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanagh is playing out in front of our eyes. One large aspect of the nomination is the alleged accusation of him sexually abusing a classmate, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford when they were in high school. With the recent hearing in which Dr. Ford went before Congress to tell her side of the sexual assault, she is coming under attack from various players. One of the attacks is questioning why she waited more than 30 years to tell of her assault. Some of my associates, both Republicans and Democrats, share the same sentiment. “Why didn’t she tell someone” As someone who experienced being sexually abused as a child, I can relate to Dr. Ford and will share why I didn’t tell.

My abuse started when I was around 10. It was my older first cousin whose mother was watching us as my mother worked. Over a year, he would lead me away from my brother and sisters and take me to his bedroom. That’s where most of the incidents happened. Always ending with my clothes off and him playing me with. Like Dr. Ford shared, there are some details I can’t say for exact. For instance, I think I was ten or I could have been 9. I can’t tell you what he was wearing or what he said to me besides threatening me not to say anything. I couldn’t tell you if it was rainy or sunny or what the weather was. But I can tell you of each physical contact when I was victimized. I can tell you what the ceiling looked like as I would always concentrate on a stain shaped like a dog, a stain which kept my mind off of what was happening. And I can tell you of many times I heard the voices of other children, including my brother and sister, playing outside unaware of the hell I was enduring.

I kept true to my attacker and did as he asked. I never said anything to anyone. Not even to myself. It was a memory that I placed in a box and wrapped it tightly, placing it back in the corner of my mind, hoping it never saw daylight again. I didn’t tell because of the shame I felt. Spending years questioning what I did for him to pick me out. Did I invite it somehow? Was there some type of energy I was putting out? And as a gay man, I wonder did I show early signs of my sexuality and he picked up on it? And yes, I even wonder if what he did to me made me gay? A question that hounded me as I suffered in silence.

According to the National Center for Crime Victims, 1 in 20 boys is a victim of child sexual abuse, children, in general, are most vulnerable between the ages of 7 and 13 and 3 out of 4 adolescents who have been sexually assaulted were victimized by someone they knew well.

Although I could never figure out why me, I can tell you what happened after. Sex is something all humans experience at various ages. Once that door is open, it’s hard to close. So my introduction

to sex was at an age when I was not mentally prepared for it. I believe it's one of the reasons I started to experiment early. I became more promiscuous and introduced adult sexual language into my vocabulary. I was a child pretending to be an adult, a child trying to learn how to drive this large vehicle called sex when I didn't even have a learners permit. It would not take long for me to eventually crash that car.

My crashing moment came when I was told I had HIV. HIV from a person who saw me as vulnerable and an easy target. I share that as I remember my state of mind before meeting the person who exposed me. I was an introvert and rarely would look anyone in the eye. I held my head low. Although I was abused when I was 10, even in my high school years I walked with shame. I blamed my assault as a contributor to me getting HIV. Feeling that if I wasn't thrust into sex so early, I'd at least be more mindful of my sexual experiences.

Many of us who have experienced sexual abuse/assault don't tell because we're also struggling with issues such as depression, anxiety and symptoms related to post-traumatic syndrome (PTSD).

For myself, I spent years denying I needed to see a mental health professional. I denied myself help as I didn't want to deal with that memory which was locked in that box. But that decision was taken away from me as that box started to open on its own. Details I had buried started to flash before my eyes like a movie. The box lid opened on its own and the memory of my ordeal came back to haunt me.

We do tell our therapists and note how the word therapist is plural. As especially when you experienced something so traumatic, you sometimes see several mental health professionals throughout your life to help you cope. Yet although you temper the memories, no matter what you still never forget. Even when you find it within you to forgive, you still never forget.

I'm telling now because I had years of fighting my demons and feel strong enough to share. I also tell as a reminder to boys and men, that you are not alone. That yes we are victimized as well. And in the spirit of telling I regain control, control I didn't feel I had when I was trapped under my family member. And although my innocence was stolen, I refuse to allow my adult life to be taken as well.

So as I reflect on this national conversation which is happening, there is some positivity as people are discussing this topic. It is also encouraging others to tell their stories, and not just women. And as a believer in sharing your truth, by doing so you regain the power that was once used unjustly against you.

Why I didn't tell was because of fear and shame. Why I did tell was so that I was now in control of the narrative and moving to a place of long due healing.

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