

The silence; Uncle Harry

I want to start this off by stating that, “the truth is the truth”. You can attempt to ignore it, wish it to go away, but in the end one can never go wrong when speaking the truth. You can worry what someone might think of you, you can worry about how it might impact others, but once you finally speak the truth, nothing ever outweighs it. Nothing is more healing to one’s soul.

As a young boy growing up, my mother’s brother Harry was by far my favorite uncle. Whenever he was around he paid great attention to me and overall he was great fun. We would wrestle, play around together, he just had a way to make a little boy feel very special. He would buy me things, do fun things with me and at 10 years old in the midst of us having fun together, he molested me. Back then, no one spoke or dealt with the fact that Uncle Harry was a serial Child Rapist / Molester. I got to find out that day, the hard way.

Anytime the, “a child has been molested”, bomb gets dropped everyone takes cover, every one hopes it never gets dropped again. Everyone wants the damage to go away as quickly as possible. I know that a large majority listening to this right now will not be receptive to the context of this subject. You will feel uncomfortable. Do not panic, you are definitely the majority.

Matter of fact statistics indicate that a majority of you in this room have either been molested/abused as a child, or know of a child that has been abused at some level. It is funny how we shut down this truth and then wonder why it never goes away, why perpetrators get off so lite, if they are prosecuted at all. Why our loved ones never heal from the abuse.

I contend that if you embrace the truth of an abused child, love them as you embrace this truth, in the end it can actually enrich the lives of all involved with the abuse. Think of that for a moment.

No one told me Uncle Harry raped and repeatedly molested my older brother. No one told me he was imprisoned for raping and molesting boy scouts whom he was their scoutmaster. No one told me about the kids he molested at the music store he worked at. No one told me about the neighborhood kids he sodomized and raped when he moved to Oregon to avoid the three strikes rule in California. No one told me about a police report where he admitted to 500 molestations.

Not Grandma, Grandpa, Aunts, Uncles, friends of the family, and most importantly my mother and father. All knew bits and pieces of his history, some they were involved with, yet no one spoke of any of it. Out of all of the silent participants, my mother’s and father’s participation in the silence has been the most difficult for me to make any sense of; to forgive.

Due to this silent participation by all involved, for a time including myself, my Uncle was able to continue to molest and hurt children. In his own words spoken in a video, he admits to molesting hundreds of children, possibly even 700. He said he was not sure, he said that he did not keep count.

How could he speak these words with such a nonchalant/matter of fact attitude?

It is in this silent participation, when a child's innocence has been taken, that this silent truth of all involved desperately needs a voice. It is that silent truth that many of you hold on to tight, that allows your suffering to continue. It is what empowers the perpetrator to continue their abusive ways.

In the summer of 1992 we had a family reunion in Dallas Oregon. I was told that Uncle Harry could be present at this reunion. My older Brother made it clear that he would not participate at the reunion if Uncle Harry would be present. It was the first time that the silent truth of Uncle Harry would be broken.

Throughout the dialog that followed the general attitude was to leave it alone we do not want to upset Grandma, he has done his time, he is a Christian now and has given his life to God. There was even talk that he was set up and innocent of his last convictions, really. It was at this moment that I knew I needed to end my silence, let anyone and everyone know, my silent truth. That he had molested me. It was time for me to acknowledge my 40+ years of silence; it was time for me to face my truth.

I had to let go of all the excuses of my past, mostly worried about what people might think of me, but also as ridiculous as it sounds, worried how it might hurt/affect others, including Uncle Harry. When I broke my silence and let the truth be the truth, it no longer seemed import to me how it rolled out or who it affected. What suddenly became most important over anything else; was for me to speak the truth. Speak it openly to free my soul, to support abused children, as well as protecting the innocent children that have not been abused.

Before the reunion I talked to my son as well as my sister's son, about, whom and what Uncle Harry was. I told them they were not to be alone with Uncle Harry period, and if they had any issues with him at any level to let me know. So we arrived from our out of state trip to mom's house for the reunion.

Harry did indeed show up to the reunion; my brother was the only hold out. My son as well as my nephew stayed well away from Uncle Harry while we were there. I observed my Cousin's arrival with her husband and two kids. Their daughter ran up to Uncle Harry arms open and he patted her on the head, waiting for her younger brother who was running toward him. Uncle Harry pushed her aside, picked up her younger brother and gave him a big hug as he patted him on his bottom.

That is when my world changed. Although at this point I did not have much information of Uncle Harry's past, what I did know was he had not changed; he was a child molester. At this point of time I still had no idea of what Uncle Harry's past entailed.

I got my family out of there because I could no longer be in the same room with him. I set up a time to talk to my cousin and her husband. I told them what I observed, that their son was at great risk, that he had molested my older brother as well as me. They were very at ease over the fact that he was saved and that he had turned himself over to the Lord. I laid it out as honest and clear as I could, but I could see that it was not getting to them. I talked to my sister and let her know that I was not getting through; hopefully she could talk some sense into them both on who Uncle Harry was and what he was capable of.

I talked to my Aunt about Uncle Harry; her attitude was he had done his time and I needed to let it go. I talked to my Mom, even to the point to ask her why she did not tell me about Uncle Harry, why did she let him around me when I was a kid? Her answer was she did not know, that was the way it was back then. She asked me to drop it that Uncle Harry had done his time and by bringing this up it can upset Grandma. She said if I had a problem with him to simply stay away from him. All of this weighed heavy on my heart and soul, what do I do with this? I was overwhelmed how everything was unfolding; I was unclear what to do with it all. I went back to Missouri with this on my shoulders.

A few years later my Sister moved to the Salem area after a divorce, met a great guy and was to be married again. She asked my Brother to give her away; he said no problem as long as Uncle Harry would not be there. She agreed and it was a big controversy within the family. I was proud of my Sister as well as my Brother for doing the right thing.

After the wedding I was visiting my Grandparents when I heard my Grandma crying in the kitchen. I asked her why she was crying and she said it hurt her that Harry was not allowed at the wedding. I told her because Harry had molested my brother when he was just 5 years old. She started to defend Harry when I held her hand, looked her in the eyes and told her gently yet firmly that; he had molested me. At that moment she had a look in her eyes as though she had a moment of understanding of who her son actually was. I hugged her and told her that I loved her.

Later I would have an in-depth conversation with my Grandpa about Uncle Harry. He openly admitted that he enabled Harry on many occasions because of Grandma. He came clean and said he suffered years of guilt over his involvement.

I saw the silence was beginning to break down; I saw clearly that it never needed to be there in the first place. It was clear that this silence had created years of unneeded pain and suffering on all involved. Dealing with the truth of who Uncle Harry was in the beginning, could have saved years of suffering of hundreds and hundreds of souls.

Years after this I hear that Uncle Harry was the Pasture of his own church, what? I told my sister that I was going to come back to Oregon and confront Harry at his church. To ensure that his congregation knew of his past, knew what he was capable of. Again at this point I do not have a clear understanding of his past and who he truly was. I never made the trip to confront Uncle Harry because of life's distractions; mostly I did not have the money.

It was in 2002 that I heard the news that Uncle Harry was again arrested for molesting some young boys from within his church. Yes you heard correctly, "at the Church he was the Pasture of". At that moment I knew that no matter the time or cost, I needed to get involved and support the victims of Uncle Harry. I contacted the Detective that was involved in the case against Uncle Harry. I let him know that I was his nephew and that I was molested by Uncle Harry as a young boy. I let him know that I knew who he was and that I wanted to do anything and everything that I could do to support his latest victims.

So I flew out to Oregon and did a video deposition to support these young boys. I talked about my family's involvement, as well as mine. I felt a great deal of guilt for not standing up to Uncle Harry. I felt

that due to my silence, who knows how many children I was personally responsible for. Supporting those boys; doing all I could to support them, was the beginning of my journey to where I am today.

I went home and wrote an impact statement that was to be read at Uncle Harry's sentencing. I also started collecting any and all information I could on Uncle Harry's past. What I found was the history of a serial child predator that went back decades. Uncle Harry was sentenced to 6 years in prison; he would be required to do all of the time. The detective and I were confident that Uncle Harry would meet his maker in prison; with Uncle Harry once again in prison, I knew that children would be safe.

Somehow Uncle Harry again survived 6 years of prison yet months before he was to be released, another of Harry's victims came forward and he was sentenced to another 6 years. Surviving the next 12 years in prison, at the age of 70, Uncle Harry was once again released and he moved into a halfway house in Salem Oregon.

I received the call that he was out of prison and back on the streets. I knew I was not going to sit back and see how things would turn out. Let him slip back into society where he could have the opportunity to hurt more children. I felt it was my responsibility to ensure he could not hurt another child. My only question was how? How was I going to make this happen?

My desperation, motivation had nothing to do with what he had done to me, but everything to do with what he is capable of doing to other children. For a long time I felt that it was my sole responsibility to stop Uncle Harry. Today I am clear that this is all of our responsibility when it comes to fixing laws and protecting our children.

The first time I went to confront Uncle Harry, he was placed in a halfway house in the same parking lot as a Head Start school for 100 preschool children under the age of 5. I prayed to God for answers on how I should handle confronting Uncle Harry, how do I ensure that he does not hurt any more children. It was through the grace of God, that for the next few months, things went down the way they did. After a whole lot of prayer, family meetings, confrontations and assaults, I gave it my best to protect children from Uncle Harry. In the mists of it all, Uncle Harry died of cancer. It was at that moment that he was no longer a threat to our children.

What I discovered along this journey was a broken system full of excuses that give the perpetrators the ability to abuse our children over and over again.

Because of this effort to protect children from Harry and end the silence of abuse, 499Silent was created. 499silent.org is about changing the stigma of child abuse. It is also about the 500 silent victims of Uncle Harry, and so far only one has fully broken the silence. It is about what it takes for the abused to heal.

499Silent gives victims of abuse at any level, as well as those associated with the abused, a place for them to break their silence and tell their story. A domino effect that will keep growing, to the point that when a child is abused, all involved know that telling their story, speaking the truth, is the right thing to do. It affects all involved, including the perpetrators.

499silent.org is on a mission to end the silence associated with child abuse, one voice at a time, one personal conversation at a time, one story at a time. To give society the courage to embrace a child that has been abused, as well as embrace the truth of the abuse. To let all know that having the courage to speak the truth is much easier to live with than shame and silence. With this new found courage we will empower the abused as well as protect those that have not been abused. I know the positive impact that courage brings to one's soul first hand.

That is what 499silent.org is waiting on, people to gain the courage to talk about child abuse at any level. For us to show those living in silent pain, that they are not alone, that when they speak out it helps us all. Those living with silent abuse need to feel safe when telling their story, when they speak the truth of their abuse. They need to know that by them having the courage to speak out; they empower others to do the same. Over time it will become the norm for us to speak out. Over time we make it difficult, if not impossible for a child abuser to hurt so many within their lifetime.

If you have been a part of a child being abused, if you have been abused as a child, share your story. Let the truth of your situation stand on its own. Let the truth be your rock to make a stand on. I stand no longer on the mountain of silence that I shared with so many others for most of my life.

I have climbed off that mountain of silence, and now proudly stand on my own rock of truth. One rock chipped off of the mountain of silence. This will begin the resurrection of a new mountain, a mountain that stands on the truth of child abuse.

I will do all I can to encourage others to take their stand as well. The hope is to chip away at one rock at a time, to let that be good enough. The hope is to get one soul at a time to be a part of this movement, to break their silence associated with an abused child. Once the silence has been broken and the truth comes out, make those associated with the abuse accountable, love and support the abused.

Wounds that have not been tended to continue to bleed; continue to hurt. It is time for us all to tend to these wounds with love and understanding. Unspoken stories of abuse, empowers the abusers, continues the suffering of the abused.

Let's open up a dialog which encourages us all to share the truth of child abuse as well as the truth of those that would abuse our children.

This is the greatest weapon we have to protect our children from those that would do them harm. This also gives those associated with child abuse, the greatest opportunity to fully heal.

For more information you can go to www.499silent.org