

The Interview

Preface

The sexual abuse of children occupies headline space in most media today, and those who read or listen to these stories feel sympathy for the victims and open hatred to those who abused them. As understandable as this might be, there is also a need to try to understand how someone could do such things. *The Interview* is an open sharing by one who did, answering the kind of questions that might be on your mind. It does not have all the answers nor do these answers fit everyone's situation, but they are an honest response and worth reading.

So, tell me, what brought you into recovery?

Two weeks before Christmas 20 years ago, I disclosed to our state's version of Youth and Family Services, that I had molested a family member who was a minor at the time.

What led up to your disclosure?

I had an unmistakable, deep conviction that my behavior was very wrong and that I needed help. I believed that my betrayal of the trust I once had with my victim would have long-term effects.

How would you know there would be long-term effects on the person you were violating?

As an abuse survivor myself, I can look back and see more clearly how manipulation and the taking away of my ability to choose when I was still a minor came to have effects on all my past, present, and future relationships.

In what way do the effects manifest themselves?

Many times through shame, feeling controlled and suspicious about whom I can trust.

Was there anything else that motivated you to disclose the abuse to the authorities?

Yes, two things in particular. First, I felt it only fair that my victim have a fighting chance for recovery. Secondly, the conviction I had that I did not want to take this 'sick secret' to the grave.

We come back to what happened after your disclosure. Being married while the above was going on, how did your wife react to the news?

She had no clue as to what was going on until my victim told her and shared that it was a case of not being comfortable when left alone with me.

What was her response to you?

Rightly so, she was very angry and wanted to know the extent of the abuse and how long it had been going on.

How did you respond to her emotions and questions?

I was angry at myself for the poor and unhealthy choices I had made and the mess I got myself into. I felt threatened by the strong emotions that were uncommon for my wife. I had difficulty trusting her with the progressive nature of the abuse, which I now believe was connected to the deep denial I was in.

What happened once you disclosed to the authorities?

We had to go to the prosecutor's office where my wife and victim were interviewed and I gave a 160 page confession to detectives before being charged and incarcerated.

What then?

Three days later my wife secured my bail. I had to live with an elderly uncle since I was no longer allowed to return to our home. Leaving the jail with her, she made it very clear that she would divorce me if this ever happened again.

How did that make you feel?

It was scary and threatening to think I could lose her but enough to know I had betrayed her trust. I also destroyed her vision of a normal, healthy marriage and left her with the shame and pain that would linger for years to come.

Did you get the help you hoped to have for your victim, for your marriage, and for yourself?

My victim was taken out of my life with no communication permitted for at least two years. The three of us did attend several therapy sessions where I attempted to show sorrow for my actions, empathy for the hurt I caused, and a willingness to take a closer look at both my self-centeredness and my control issues. My victim felt expected to forgive me but as time went on, chose not to do so.

And your marriage?

Miraculously, it stayed intact. Seven years of couple's therapy helped us look at our dysfunctional family-of-origin issues along with the unhealthy parts we brought into our marriage.

Anything else?

Over time, we both developed separate support systems that included 12-step meetings, recovery groups, and individual counseling. My wife became good friends with our

therapist's wife – who would also sit in on our sessions and be of support to her. Later, she and my wife formed a women's support and recovery group. We befriended other couples in recovery that gave us hope for healing.

And what help have you personally received?

At the start of this family crisis, I didn't know what to expect. This was a whole new world to me and a journey I had not been on before. I had to learn I could no longer control outcomes or people. I also had to learn self-control, the importance of healthy boundaries, and accountability to others. I have this accountability with several men's groups I still attend to this day.

Anything else you are learning on this journey?

Yes. A temptation to make this all about me still lingers. Developing true sympathy and empathy for my victim and for my wife hasn't happened overnight. I can no longer go around the pain and shame but must go through it to heal.

What consequences are going on for you in a legal sense?

Some of the consequences for my actions will never end and I have had to live with that. Being a parolee for 20 years now and under Megan's Law requires monthly home visits and drug testing. I am also required to register with the Detective Bureau in my town for photo and fingerprinting every 90 days. I am not permitted to vote, must obtain permission to travel out of state, and can no longer purchase life insurance, since those who are incarcerated are considered high risk and generally have a shorter life span. Were I incarcerated, I would not be allowed to collect Social Security.

Some states also ban those with a felony charge from living in an assisted living environment. Currently, there are strict limits on overseas travel with at least a six month time frame to gain approval. Having a felony charge on your record also makes it all the more difficult to find employment.

Under Social Security rules, I would not be eligible to be a 'representative payee' for my adult children or my wife were they to become disabled.

How do all these restrictions make you feel?

Sometimes I feel like a victim of the system but my feelings pale in comparison to the pain and shame I put my victim through. I recognize, too, the effects the abuse will have and have had on past, present, and future relationships. Abusing a child, betraying trust, and jeopardizing their need for safety is very unfair.

Many of my own consequences seem unfair and it's easy to be resentful about them. But it's also very unfair and selfish of me to treat someone I say I love the way I did. I made my victim an object to be used, not a person to be respected and valued.

What would you say to a person about to abuse or is already abusing?

I would say “Get help and get out of any denial that you have a serious problem! What you are thinking of doing or already doing wounds a person’s soul. We are as sick as our secrets, so uncover the darkness and bring all this ‘stuff’ into the light. You are broken and cannot fix yourself. Find a trusted friend or counselor to disclose what you are hiding. Maybe this person will go as far as going with you to the authorities if your situation needs to be reported. By doing so, you open the door for your victim to also get help.

“Be serious and motivated to get help, if not for yourself then for your victim(s). Allow your victim(s) to have a fighting chance at recovery. The sooner you come out of the shadows, the better.

After over 20 years in recovery, do you feel you are no longer vulnerable to thoughts of acting out again?

No, I am still vulnerable, especially in my thought life. The difference now is I no longer entertain fantasies and have internal boundaries to remove myself from volatile situations (ie never being alone with a minor, no staring or leering at minors. etc). I realize that recovery is life-long, not merely programs or meetings with others struggling with addictions.

What do you mean by ‘internal boundaries’?

In my personal recovery system, I would automatically refrain from talking to a minor without an adult present. If a situation feels uncomfortable, like being near minors on a beach or at a pool, I would relocate to another spot on the beach. For my own sense of integrity, I work to keep moral boundaries as well. My wife sees what I am looking at, so I want to not only be accountable to her but to other men and supporters of our marriage and on ongoing recovery. To have moral integrity.

What would you say to a victim?

A child needs to know he or she is safe around peers, siblings, and adults. When they are unsafe and/or traumatized, life becomes unstable and confusing, especially in answering the question “Who do I trust? Who will believe me? Is this my fault? Why did this happen to me? How can I go on with my life?”

You *can* go on with your life. There *is* hope. There *is* healing. You are not alone. Never give up.