



Men Speak Out

State of the Organization: A message from our new president

We passed through a difficult year in 2004, with resolution of our dispute over costs of the 2003 conference and the review of the retreat program. Then Fred Tolson resigned as President due to unforeseen family circumstances. I moved up from President-Elect to replace Fred this past month. Now the board is about to meet. Here are the challenges facing us, challenges we will be discussing at the upcoming meeting:

Board vacancies: a number of board members' terms of office have ended, most notably Richard Gartner's. We have a roster of potential candidates to fill those spots.

The retreat program will be stronger than ever. We are closing in on efforts to obtain liability insurance for the retreats. Also, Howard and associates will be drafting an updated, more complete policy and procedure manual.

We are having our finances run through audits so

that we will be positioned to apply for major fund-raising grants, a long-awaited goal that we hope will fund not just the operations of MaleSurvivor, especially our website and provide for greater services, but might also underwrite the retreat programs so that they can be expanded. We also hope to get grants to fund the next conference.

Conference planning is also high on the new year's agenda. By the next issue of this newsletter we hope to have plans in place for another major, international conference.

Always open to hearing from you, I am honored to be President. I hope you will let me know what new or expanded services you might suggest, what issues you feel we should be addressing, what changes you might envision.

Murray David Schane, M.D., *President*

My History: A Journey Through

Many survivors sharing an account of one's past would title this article as 'My Story'. I prefer to use the title, 'My History' because when I think of a story, I think of something that may contain some fiction (not that any of your 'stories' have done so). So, here is 'My History' and my recovery journey from having been sexually abused as a child. After I provide a brief summary of what happened to me, I will share with you some strategies that I used to help me cope in my recovery. Then, I will suggest some ideas that you may wish to use to help you in your recovery. I have learned that it is usually best to give advice when requested or in a life-threatening situation but I thought I would take the liberty anyway, to offer some ideas.

I am 47 years old and I was 34 years old when I had my first memory of having been sexually abused by my older brothers. I was born into an intact family and I am the youngest of seven children – four older brothers and two sisters. I had already been in psychotherapy for five years at the time of my first recollection. The memory I recalled, that had

been repressed for 34 years, was a memory of being raped by an older brother. I was two years old. Later in treatment, I recalled another incident in which I was in infant, on my back and in a crib. An older brother was over me and his penis was in my mouth. I don't remember which brother but I clearly remember that a penis had been put in my mouth. Recalling this memory explained the regular nightmares I used to have about choking and gagging.

These incidences took place from infancy until age four or five. One of the most frustrating characteristics of my recovery is not being able to recall all the specific details or the exact causes of these early childhood days. I did recently learn that my father was physically abusive towards my oldest brother, who is 12 years older than me. This brother perpetrated most of the abuse against me or forced the other brothers to perpetrate the abuse. My father's treatment of him provides some explanation for his 'terrorist' acts against his younger siblings.

After age five, my oldest brother's control tactics contin-

ued but the abuse was much less invasive. It consisted of things such as being forced, even into my adolescence, to give him back rubs upon demand. Also, he would regularly 'grab' me, or another male sibling, by the penis when I would walk by him on the way to dinner or while leaving the house. He would laugh, others who were present might chuckle, but I found it disgusting and disrespectful. How my two sisters were involved with the behaviors is still somewhat unclear. I do have one memory of being under the covers of a blanket with an older sister and we were 'exploring' each other. I was about seven years old and she was 11. Thus, my two sisters must have seen sexual behaviors occurring – or experienced them - as this incident was not normal. However, I believe my sisters were more peripheral to the violence that occurred between the males.

When I discovered that I had been sexually abused as an infant, I confronted my oldest brother, who denied it. The rest of my family aligned around him and were advised by a counselor to each write me a 'goodbye' letter, stating that each could not be around me based on my 'lies'. Given this and my own feelings of lacking safety around my family, I chose to stop having contact with all of them for about five years. During the early days of recalling these memories, one brother, now deceased, reported similar incidences of abuse but he later recanted, a common occurrence, we know, when one's anxiety is too high and psychological and physical safety feels compromised.

After four years of having no contact with my family, my sister informed me of my father's ill-health and I re-initiated contact, which was about seven years ago. At this time, except for my mother, with whom I visit and speak to regularly, I mostly see my siblings at special occasions. I keep contact limited so as to maintain my sense of self. I am also very cognizant of my family's first response to my disclosure and I don't want to be re-injured by their denial and rejection. I keep the conversations limited to 'safe' topics.

It has been 13 years since learning about these childhood traumas. On the one hand, these 'discoveries' brought on one of the most painful and distressful times in my life. On the other hand, they explained many of the behaviors I exhibited the first 34 years of my life – an eating disorder, a propensity towards drugs and sexual promiscuity, suicidal thoughts during adolescence, frequent nightmares of choking and gagging, etc. etc. The last 13 years have been spent 'reliving' these abuse experiences in therapy, putting them in perspective and moving on. During these 13 years, I divorced, remarried, and had two more children with my second wife (one child from my first marriage). I work in the child welfare field and I am a licensed psychotherapist. I am finally, while approaching 50, beginning to enjoy my life. I named my new daughter (born in August, 2004) 'Elizabeth', which means 'God is bountiful' in Hebrew. I have turned the corner from

being me-focused to other-focused and that feels good.

So, what strategies did I use to cope? I employed various methods, some not so constructive, to help me cope with what I discovered at age 34. Drinking was one method I used to cope with my life at that time, a life that began to fall apart. Though I did not consume a lot of alcohol, I drank almost daily and it numbed some of the rage and anxiety. Also, in the early days of my recovery, I would express my rage by throwing rocks at old abandoned buildings or, while hiking in a desolate place, I would beat on a tree or a plant with a stick. Also, as I wanted to avoid people, at times, on my lunch hour or after work, I would drive through a gravesite near my work place because it was the only place where I thought I could be with 'people' and feel safe. Basically, I dealt with my rage and anxiety in the early days of my recovery in different ways and some of the ways were not the most kind to myself or my environment (and I consider myself an environmentalist.).

Some productive, positive strategies I used – and continue to use – through my recovery are my faith and the positive relationships in my life. My faith in God has been my primary cure. I was raised a Catholic and, though not an advocate of many of the Catholic Church's current teachings, my faith experience has given me an awareness of God's goodness. My belief in God's unwavering love has been the anchor that has helped me to survive. My relationship to God forms the umbrella under which my other relationships have evolved.

My relationship with my psychotherapist has been one of those relationships. Eighteen years ago I was fortunate to find a psychologist that is not only an expert in the field of trauma recovery but he completely 'gets this stuff'. He has nurtured and supported me through the recovery process and has literally, re-parented me. He has served as my therapist, mentor, and friend. Another relationship that has helped in my recovery is the one with my wife. She has been my anchor for the last several years and she helps quiet some of the screams – and demons – in my mind. Additionally, I have a good friend who has helped me to keep my sanity. Finally, my affiliation with the VOICES (Victims of Incest Can Emerge Survivors) and MaleSurvivor organizations have given me strength and taught me that I am not alone. Tremendous healing and fellowship has come from the relationships I have established with other survivors and retreat/conference facilitators at these organizations' recovery retreats and annual conferences.

Finally, what advice would I give a survivor of childhood sexual abuse? As I mentioned in the beginning of this article, I believe one should give advice sparingly. Besides, most of you are probably aware of these ideas. Some of the points stated below will be a reiteration, in a different format, from what I have shared in earlier paragraphs regarding what has helped me in my recovery. I share them with the intention of



providing you with some practical tools for you to use to help yourself heal. Some of them may help and some – or all of them - may not. That is ‘okay’, as your path to recovery is YOUR path.

Be easy on yourself. I tend to be very hard on myself and some of that may have to do with being victimized. Perhaps you are self-critical and, when you don’t meet a certain standard, you feel like a failure. Or perhaps you are always comparing yourself to others and seeing them as happier and more well-adjusted. Recognize that this may be part of your history and that the healing process is slow. Make an effort to be less critical. I am reminded of John Bradshaw’s remark at the July 2003 VOICES conference, ‘Compare yourself ONLY to yourself’. When I do that, I am reminded of how far I have come.

Use the skills you learned to survive your childhood in your adulthood. Perhaps nothing that you encounter as an adult will challenge you as much or provoke as much anxiety as being victimized. Remember this and use those skills to face your current challenges! (And certainly, remember that IT WASN’T YOUR FAULT.)

Find a therapy that works for you. Your ‘therapy’ could be prayer, meditation or traditional psychotherapy. One of my favorites is exercise, which helps me to get more in touch with my body and stops a tendency to disassociate. When I exercise, I am also reminded that I have control over my body. Other therapies that I use are prayer and spending time with my spouse. Find something, nonabusive to yourself and oth-

ers, that ‘grounds’ you.

Read abuse literature. Books by Mic Hunter and Mike Lew have been invaluable supports to remind me that I am not alone and many of the symptoms that I experience are normal, given the abuse I encountered. Also, reading personal accounts of survival may benefit you. I do caution you, though, that much of this literature, as you probably know, can be depressing and provoke your anxiety so monitor yourself and stop reading for as long as necessary until you ‘regroup’.

Join Support Organizations. I joined MaleSurvivor and VOICES a few years ago and both organizations have provided me incredible healing. The yearly conferences and retreats have reduced my feelings of isolation and connected me with a support community. The women and men who run these organizations have helped me – and all of us survivors – to move beyond the shame and loneliness that is so insidious to the abuse. These organizations educate the public about childhood sexual abuse and they give survivors, like myself, a forum in which to make public our histories of survival.

Well, that is my recovery journey and some strategies that I have used – and that may assist you - to heal. I came across a sentence recently that summarized my journey and I will share it as my final thought:

IN THE DESOLATE OF WINTER, I FINALLY LEARNED
THAT WITHIN ME LIES AN INVINCIBLE SUMMER.

Within each of you lies an invincible summer. Good luck in your recovery!

Book Review: In The Company Of Men: Male Dominance and Sexual Harassment

Edited by James E. Gruber & Phoebe Morgan
Northeastern University Press



It was not that long ago the phrases “male victim” and “male survivor” didn’t appear in the indexes of books on sexual abuse because the sexual abuse of males was regulated to a footnote that said something to the effect, “Although the sexual abuse of males exists it occurs infrequently and therefore will not be directly addressed in this text.”

I am happy to report the editors of *In the company Of Men* saw fit to include an entire chapter on males as

victims of sexual harassment. Within it the author discussed the types of sexual harassment men experience. She

included information based on the Sexual Harassment of Men Scale and the Men’s Sexual Harassment Experience Scale. These measure the three primary types of sexual harassment experienced by men, coercive sexual advances, hostility towards men as a group, and attacks on one’s masculinity (not being a “real man”).

In addition the chapter on the history of sexual harassment in U.S. courts also addresses males as victims. Overall the authors of all the chapters show compassion for men who do not fit the American stereotype of masculinity, and even when discussing men who perpetrate sexual abuse the authors manage to portray them, not as evil, but as products of gender role conditioning. The editors noted there are already over 250 books on the subject of sexual harassment, Even so, with this new book they have put together a worthwhile volume that deserves attention from both women and men.

Mic Hunter, Psy. D.

In the Realms of the All-Too-Real



In the past year three films seem to have arisen out of the sex abuse scandals of the Catholic Church. The entertainment value of that crisis was, of course, not lost on the news media, which focused on the complicity of the Church, the level of cash paid out to claimants, the role of the vow of celibacy as a contributing and perhaps dangerous factor, and judicial deaf ears. But very little was said about the plight of the boys, now men, whose lives were “interrupted” and indelibly affected.

In these films entertainment value was shifted back onto the victims whose fate, in each case, was horrific. First we had “Mystic River,” which begins with one boy about ten years old plucked off the street while playing ball with two friends and thrown into a car with a priest in the back seat giving him an assuring—and leering—pat on the shoulder. We are never sure if that man was really a priest or merely disguised as one, but the dramatic effect was there: these were Catholic boys literally preyed upon by the two highest authority figures in their community: a policeman and a priest. What follows is a stark, your-worst-nightmare picture of sexual enslavement ending only when the boy miraculously escapes and returns home. That whole episode ends with a curtain drawn on his bedroom window suggesting that his fate and his future was then sealed forever away.

Next we meet the boy as the forty-ish Dave walking with his son. Dave is a caricature of the marked man. Despite his love and obvious ability to care for his ten-year-old son, he is really being devoured by his unreleased demons. It’s an old, trite device Dave’s character is fashioned with: a past trauma assumes a recurrent dream-like form that plays over and over: a boy being chased by hungry wolves. Dave gets spooky when he talks about vampires as if he thinks he is one, although how this relates to his “dream” is unclear; but the device gives his wife the sense that Dave is scary, mad, unreachable. The rest of the movie is taken up with the murder of his old friend’s daughter, played with scenery-chewing ultra-heavy fierceness. Poor weird Dave happened to have enacted his dream scenario at the same time the murder took place. He had come upon a pedophile (the wolf) abusing a boy and pummeled the man to death. What’s wrong with this picture? It would seem to have been a heroic act and, if the script paradigm were followed, Dave should have been released from his nightmare when he finally killed the wolf. In reality would this ever occur? The nightmare scenario would more likely have taken the form of Dave’s feet that he had been infected with wolfishness, that he might himself become a pedophile. And what about his apparently happy ten-year marriage? How did that happen and how did Dave suddenly seem to fall apart? Maybe it was a suddenly recovered memory, but the movie suggests that Dave has been living with his internal nightmare grinding away at him. In the end we feel an oh-well-he-was-irreparably-damaged-anyway sense of Dave’s awful fate, to be terminally victimized again,

to be used to bend a who-done-it around a theme of male sexual abuse boiled up out of old plot devices.

In “Conspiracy of Silence,” an Irish film released here this winter, the Church comes under a severe drumming. Two scandals of its abuse of power, its truly fiendish hypocrisy, and the destructiveness of the untenable vow of chastity run through the film. In the background is the suicide of a young priest, who was forced into a sexual liaison with the local bishop and somehow infected with HIV. Up front is the story of a seminarian expelled when a senior makes a sexual advance and who then returns home and rediscovers his girl friend, has sex with her and ultimately decides to become an Anglican so he can be a priest and also get married. Once again the sexually abused victim is used to foment a script that seems underwritten by a polemic against the church on almost every level: its invidious and secret sexual misadventures, its suppression of AIDS among the priesthood so that it goes untreated, the implicitly nefarious operation of the chastity vow, the power of the church to suppress news media, etc. The poor-bastard victim never had a chance, was never given a life in the film. We only see him protesting before the pope, with a placard screaming “The Church Has AIDS,” and then, in full priestly raiment, blowing his brains out with a shotgun. It makes for a lurid back-story but only advances the notion, as does “Mystic River,” that male survivors don’t survive but just get written off.

Then there is “Bad Education,” film-maker Pedro Almodóvar’s attempt at gay film noir. The hero is, we think, a still young ex-transvestite turned actor who drops a film script about his early life on the desk of a boyhood flame. Well, the boys were separated by the priest who, jealously in love with our boy hero, sets about abusing him. The boy graduates into skirts, high heels, false tits, and blond wig. He’s still in love with his boyhood flame, but, as we learn much later, he gets addicted to heroin and finally is killed by overdosing. The film-within-the-film script has the transvestite hero, in luscious full drag, confronting his abuser, demanding hush money and then getting murdered by a priest-accomplish. A lurid tale spun out to show how the priest groomed the boy, encouraging his beautiful singing and selecting him to be his alter boy, how the boy was confused and apparently dismayed by this and how terrible and unfair it was to send his flame away. By the end of the film our transvestite has emerged as an ugly, self-centered, wasted, and unconscionable user whose death seems deserved. And the priest, now out of the church, is a somewhat likable though luckless guy who seems to have shifted from boys to young men. Again, male sexual victimization appears as a handy plot device that can be fashioned at the film-maker’s will because most people know little about it and are ready to swallow any tall, distorted, lurid, and doomed tale.

So the good news is that films are paying some attention to us. The bad news is that they see us as dispensable losers, lost men who end up badly. Not good.

