

In the summer of 1983, social services managed to get me out of my home. I was about to turn ten years old, and this wasn't the first time they had tried to free me of the physical abuse that was my daily experience in my father and stepmother's house.

They had tried before, and I had lied to protect the silence that is such an integral part of child abuse. I had lied about the starvation, about being locked out in bitter winter weather without proper clothing, about being hit. I had protected my abuser, hiding the nights I slept naked on the floor in the hallway, my isolation from any friends, and the times I had to eat my own vomit.

I had attempted suicide a few times, but only in ways that could look like an accident, in case I failed and would be punished for trying. Fortunately, every car I jumped in front of stopped in time. Death seemed the only way out because I could not even imagine breaking the code of silence that I lived under.

The only reason I got out was because my dirty underwear and socks became so visible, because I was begging other kids for lunch at school, because I smelled too bad for the cause to be anything else. I only got out because my physical condition told the truth I was unable to speak, and so other people acted.

I told you the year -- 1983 -- because I want you to understand that almost four decades has done nothing to make that abuse less a part of who I am. I wake up each morning an adult survivor of child abuse, I hike mountains as an adult survivor of child abuse, I raise children as an adult survivor of child abuse, and I enjoy Dolly Parton and Bruce Springsteen, all as an adult survivor of child abuse. It is not all of who I am, but it will forever be a part of my identity. I will always feel her nails digging into my cheek as she grabbed me.

I am one of the lucky ones. First, someone else was able to get me out. But second, those who spoke up for me gave me the gift of naming the abuse, which has allowed me to speak openly about what happened. I do so often, because I find it reduces the stigma for others. "We are not broken," is my message. "We are changed, we are molded by our abuse, but we are not damaged goods."

Many people cannot speak of it as I do.

Every time I speak or write about my abuse, at least one person comes forward to say: "It happened to me, too." Sometimes they say it loudly, but usually they wait for the room to clear out or contact me later. Often, it is the first time they have said it out loud.

Survivors of physical abuse also often get the message their abuse was not as "serious" as sexual abuse. This false narrative heightens the shame and the silence.

The saddest moments are when men -- men in their 40s and their 50s, men who have raised entire families -- look at me and whisper, "You're the only person I have told this other than my wife."

*You're the only person I have told this other than my wife.*

They have gone decades *without being able to name* the crime that was committed against them. And that is because the code of silence is part of the crime, the heart of the crime. That shame and silence is a prerequisite to the hitting, the starving, the damage to the body. And that shame and silence lives on for decades afterwards.

You cannot have a statute of limitations on a crime that by its very nature silences the only witness for decades.

S.99 will let survivors of abuse know that we, as a society, do not diminish the terrible crime that was committed against them, and that we will not be complicit in the silence that was forced upon them. It will give them the time they need to say the words.

Emily Rosenbaum

April 2, 2021