

I'M TELLING

A Story That Has To Be Told...

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ASSOCIATED TERMS AND THEIR DEFINITIONS.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	vii
MY STORY.....	1
COLORISM.....	47
PEDOPHILIA.....	49
SPOTTING PEDOPHILES.....	51
WARNING SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE.....	59
HOTLINES FOR CHILD ABUSE.....	63
INSPIRATIONAL POEMS	64

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ASSOCIATED TERMS AND THEIR DEFINITIONS

To be able to handle a case correctly, you must be knowledgeable of its background. Having a piece-by-piece of the in-and-out information is extremely helpful. Below are some of the commonly associated terms for child abuse and their meanings.

- Pedophilia – Sexual perversion in which children are preferred sexual objects
- Psychopath – A mentally ill or unstable person
- Sociopath – Antisocial behavior personality
- Bipolar – Intense “mood episodes” involving switching rapidly between moods
- Narcissism – Love or desire for one’s self
- Denial- Refusing to acknowledge that an event occurred
- Rationalization – Creating a logical reason for bad behavior
- Justification – An acceptable reason for doing something that justifies an action
- Pathological liar – An individual who habitually tells lies so exaggerated or bizarre that they are suggestive of mental health disorder
- Coping Mechanism: In psychology, dealing expending conscious effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems and seeking to master, minimize or tolerate stress or conflict. The effectiveness of the coping

efforts depends on the type of tension and conflict, the particular individual and the circumstances.

- Dissociation Disorder: In psychology, dissociation is any vast array of experiences from physical and emotional experience. The dominant characteristic of all dissociative phenomena involves a detachment from reality, rather than a loss of fact as in psychosis.

INTRODUCTION



There is a reason behind the story *I'm Telling*. The idea dawned on me as I woke up one morning, realizing that if I had died that day, my story would not be told. I would have buried the family secrets that pained me in my heart along with my physical body. Before I had prolonged telling the story and neglected the need for it to be told out of the fear of hurting people's feelings. Continuing to think that way would have been a disservice to myself because for years I waited for my mother to apologize for the pains her husband, my father, put me through. Having just heard this, you might be thinking I am a survivor of a traumatic experience that occurred in my childhood; you are certainly correct. I was mentally, physically and sexually abused at the hands of my biological father. I not only had to endure this but also had to experience the negative effects of colorism as well. See, many on the outside looking in could not see my father loathed me because I was light-skinned. He could not allow himself to comprehend that he could indeed father a light-skinned child. Therefore, his hatred became a barrier to my acceptance.

I hold no answers as to why he grew up hating people of a lighter complexion and became a "serial rapist". As a result, I include only my authentic voice in my story, which you are about to read. My only hope is to bring awareness to sexual abuse and colorism in the African American community. I

sincerely desire the opportunity to assist others that might have endured the same trauma I went through.

Be blessed and thank you for your support,

—“PEACHES” K.T

MY STORY



My grandmother would always tell me the story of the day I was born. The story of how my dad reacted when he saw me for the first time in the hospital. She would say, “Peaches, I remember when your dad caused a huge scene at the nursery. He walked away screaming and cursing as he walked away from the nursery window saying, ‘That damn baby isn’t mine! She’s too damn light skin! I don’t make any motherfucking light-skinned children!’” My grandmother did try to convince him that I would get darker later as I grew older. But I remained as I was.

Growing up in my house was a horrifying experience. My dad was bent on the fact that he could not father a light-skinned child. He mentally, physically and sexually abused me as a result. I was not allowed to have new things or even toys. I could not play with my mom’s Topsy-Turvy doll because she was told to keep it hidden from me. I did not receive the things that little girls wanted or needed most. Ribbons for my hair were out of the question. No one was allowed to touch my hair; even a comb for my hair was sacrilege. Therefore, my hair stayed matted to my head all the time. I was not allowed new clothes like my little brother; I had to get my clothes from the thrift store. Shoes had to hurt my feet before my mom could receive permission to buy me another pair. However, my

father said no often. If I were to put Vaseline on my lips, he would smack me down to the floor. I could not do anything to improve my appearance. Not even one thing. There were always arguments about my complexion. My brother's darker skin did not help the situation; it only made it worse.

My dad was an average built man of about 5'7" with a dark complexion. He was the only boy in his family, having two sisters. He was a troubled child during his childhood and adolescence. He would beat up little girls that he thought were ugly. He even was closer to his dark-skinned sister and tortured the light-skinned one. Our family never knew why he had such a great hatred for light-skinned people nor did we see how it all onset. However, his father was a child molester. Therefore, my father may have seen things in his household that made him turn out the way he did. The older he became, the more he molested, robbed stores and raped women. He was in and out of jail and even resorted to changing his last name so that he would not be easily identified. He would go by the name "Tilghman, Tillman," and sometimes he would use my brother's name by putting the third (III) at the end of his name. You would never catch him outside the house without his baseball cap, dark sunglasses and gun, as though he were hiding from someone or looking out for people to shoot. He drove a van with a bed in the back of it. It was for cheating, molesting little girls or raping women. I am sure it was used for all of the above.

My father's reputation in the neighborhood was so bad that everyone was afraid of him. They knew he always carried a gun. He would threaten to kill people if they made him mad. He would rob the neighborhood stores and the owners would be too afraid to point him out to the police. The rumor was you

may come up missing if you made my father mad. He once burned down a woman's house to keep her from testifying against him because she accused him of raping her. Nothing happened after that because she was nowhere to be found.

The women in our family took advantage of my dad's reputation. They would beat up their boyfriends and husbands because they knew that the men were terrified of my dad. Every weekend the family would go to Marshall Hall and get drunk and then fight each other. One of the family rules was never call the police. If someone got cut up, they would patch them up in the kitchen. Our family secrets stayed a secret.

I hated going to the beach because my dad liked to watch me drown. He would look at me and then smile; I always knew what he was about to do in those moments. I would start running out of the heavy wave, not getting too far. He later would catch me and take me to the water with me screaming and crying. He would then walk me back to the beach and throw me in, knowing that I did not know how to swim. All that I could see was dirty water above my head as I tried to hold my breath. As I would swim closer to the shore, I could see my dad laughing at me while I was drowning. Family members would watch in horror, afraid to help me. I would then reached the sand and just sit there crying for the rest of the day while my cousins played and had fun. I would just try to survive for that day, desperately wanting to go home.

My father was an evil man. If you were to say "Good morning" to him, he would reply, "What's so fucking good about it?" There were guns hidden everywhere in our house. One was always underneath his pillow, another in the bathroom cabinet, another atop the refrigerator, and another

duct-taped on the side of his dresser drawer. Whoever he was waiting for, he was ready for them.

He would spend his days sitting in his favorite recliner, ordering everyone around. I was in charge of getting his glass of cold water. I would continuously listen out for my name to be called to avoid getting into trouble. His water had better be cold, or I would get smacked right onto the floor. He would spend his evening sitting at the dining table rolling up his drugs with his gun right beside him. Though there were guns everywhere, we knew not to touch them. It was by far the last thing we would have done.

My Kindergarten Experiences

I clearly remember my first day of kindergarten. My mom escorted me into this school building as I held onto her skirt, unsure of why I was there. I was not used to being around strangers. As we walked into the classroom, I could see these bright colors on the wall. I saw toys and children sitting at their desks making name tags with crayons. It seemed like an enjoyable place to be but I did not want to be here. I wanted to stay with my mom. She then leaned over and told me that she would be back later to pick me up. She walked over to the teacher and whispered something to her. The teacher came over to me and took my hand, walking me to my desk. As I looked around for my mom, she disappeared into the hallway. I began to cry, not wanting to be with strangers. I ran over to the classroom window, hoping to get a final glimpse of my mom. But not seeing my mom made me cry louder.

The teacher walked over to console me while the other kids just looked at me. The teacher walked me out of the classroom

and down to the principal's office to call my mom. I sat in a chair in the office waiting for my mom to return. About an hour later, my mom walked into the principal's office. She looked over at me as she spoke to my teacher.

My mom walked over to me and took my hand and she said, "Come on, Peaches, I have to take you to work with me until I can find a babysitter." She took me across the street to the bus stop to get to her workplace. She was a waitress at a restaurant called Chicken Bucket in Washington D.C. Once we arrived she sat me down on the end counter while she tried to call family members to come and get me. No one seemed concerned that I was there. They were feeding me food and giving me candy. I ended up staying the whole day. This continued throughout the entire week until my mom could explain to me why I had to be with strangers at that school.

After some time, I attended school full-time, playing with toys that I was not allowed to have and no longer afraid to be around strangers. I do not know how it happened but I think things went well enough for my mother to take me back to school.

The Thrift Store

One day my mom took me shopping for clothes. My mom said, "Peaches, let's go get you some clothes." We went to catch the bus because my dad would not take us in his car, not for something that would benefit me. We went to a thrift store called Value Village in Washington D.C.

I was so happy riding back home. I came back home with a trash bag full of clothes. Even though the bag was heavy, I wanted no help from my mom. I carried it myself. I ran into

the house and up the stairs to my room, dumping everything on my bed, and then tried everything on before my dad got home. My favorite dress was one that cost only forty-five cents. Though my brother's clothes would be brand new and come from a store called Mc BRIDES, I had more! Little did I know, it was only because of the color of my skin.

My Brother's Poem: A Broken Rose

My little brother and I were scared to death of my father. If we heard his keys jingling at the front door, we would run and hide, not wanting to be his target for that day. After coming home he would walk into the kitchen to make sure that dinner was cooked and also to check if anyone had touched his dessert. He loved his dessert after dinner. If he found out that you had touched his dessert, he would make you put your hands on the hot radiator or stove. This is how he tortured us. My brother wrote the following poem about my experience:

There she lies in her bed.

This time of night, oh how she dreads the brass knob.

Turning on the door.

A darken image that was there before.

She prays to God every day, to make it stop. Please go away.

But over and over her gown will rise, Frozen with fear she shuts her eyes. A faint whisper in her ear, a painful moan that no one hears.

Her hands are tightly bound to her bed.

I'm Telling

A substance flow color red, her rose has been broken before she weds.

Now the sun has begun to rise.

As she wipes her tears from her eyes. Keep it a secret and never tell.

A voice in her ear she knows it well

Oh, how she wishes it all would end. But the night will fall. He'll be back again.

My Family

One evening my mom was in the kitchen making my favorite dinner: fried potatoes, pork, and beans with sausages in it. We called it the poor man dinner, delicious! The rules in our house were our dad would be the first to eat and that he would get the most significant piece of meat. He sat in his favorite recliner, as always, waiting to be served as my mom fixed his plate. She then told my brother and I that she would be back to fix our plates.

We sat at the table watching her take my father's food to the living room. She placed his plate on the folding table and then walked back into the kitchen. He then threw his food up against the wall and said that his food was too hot and asked her to fix him another plate. We all were watching and listening to this crazy man curse about his hot food. My mom made him another dish. She then made the kids' plates and rushed off to her evening job, leaving us scared of what else our father might do while she was away. My brother and I would always go to my cousin Danna's house to stay whenever my mom was admitted to the hospital after getting

beat up by our father or because she was exhausted from working two jobs. I grew attached to my cousin, not wanting anyone else to babysit me. I felt safe with her. She took outstanding care of me.

One afternoon my cousin decided to take me home to get some extra clothes to stay overnight with her. As we walked into my house, my dad had this young girl bent over having sex with her in our living room. She was no more than fourteen years old. He looked up at us with a surprised look. My cousin grabbed my hand and we began to run out of the house. He chased us down the street. When he caught up with us, he offered my cousin money to not tell my mom about what she had seen. She refused his money and said that she was going to tell my mom. He then grabbed her and pushed her against a car threatening to kill her. She fell to the ground, with me falling with her because she refused to let me go. We then got up from the ground and ran home to tell her mom about what had happened to us. Her mom told my mother to get that young girl out of our house quick. This young girl left after having a son but we never saw her ever again. My dad stayed hidden from the family members for a while because everyone was aware that he had raped that young girl. My mom did not do anything about it, but what could she do? She was fighting for her own life living with this man. Our family was truly a dysfunctional group of people.

The Home

I remember living in an apartment in Washington D.C. close to the zoo. Our family lived on different levels of the building. My grandmother lived on the bottom floor where all

of the children in the family would play. We were only allowed to play with each other. No outsider was allowed because of too many family secrets. We had to be on the building steps when the street lights came on and my grandmother would come outside and take count to make sure we all were there. If you were not there, you had to pick your switch from outside for your whipping. Surprisingly, no one was allowed to whip me. My dad would hit his mother for spanking me. He was the only person who could abuse me. Crazy, I know.

One evening my cousins and I were playing in the living room. My grandmother ran into the apartment yelling for all of us to play in the backroom. She said that grown folks had to talk. Back in the day, kids were not allowed to listen in on adult conversations; we had to leave the room. So we all ran down the hall to the back bedroom to play. But I was a nosy child. I crept out of the backroom and went into the kitchen to listen in on their conversation. I could hear my grandma asking my cousins for money. She was calling family members on the phone telling them that there was a "HITMAN" outside sitting in his car waiting to kill my dad and he wanted money. I could hear my grandma panicking. She said that she was going back outside to talk to him to ask for more time. This stupid guy had no clue who he was messing with. He was lucky that my dad was in jail at the time. He was always in jail but seemed to get out quicker than most people. So, I waited for my dad to be killed by this "HITMAN." I waited and waited. But my dad was still alive and we never heard from that man ever again.

Whenever my dad was in jail, his mother was in charge of keeping the family together. She was a petite, feisty lady under five feet tall. Her husband was over six feet tall. I called him a

gentle giant because he was “scared to death” of my father. My dad would put his gun in his face in front of everyone, threatening to kill him if he touched his mother. I watched my dad smash him in the head with a shoe before. All of the men in the family were afraid of him and the women knew it.

One evening my grandma was babysitting me over at her place while my mom was at work. I was sitting in the living room watching television when I heard her arguing with her husband. They were both drunk, cursing each other out. I was used to this sort of craziness in my family, so it did not bother me. I could see that my grandma wanted to continue arguing but her husband wanted to go to sleep. She still wanted to keep the argument going. She came into the living room and grabbed me off the floor. Then we walked down the hallway into the kitchen. She said to me, “Peaches, I’m going to show you how to boil water and throw it on a man if they bother you.” She then pulled a pan out from under the cabinet and placed it on the stove. She then said, “Make sure you put sugar in the water; it sticks to the skin better.” I had no idea what she was talking about. But kids were not expected talk; we just listened. Because the water was taking too long to boil, she grabbed a bottle of hot sauce from the counter and grabbed my hand again while walking back down the hallway to her bedroom where her husband was sound asleep. She then put the hot sauce on his eyelids. He woke up screaming running down the hallway into the bathroom. I could hear the splashes of water. I felt sorry for this gentle giant, while my grandmother laughed at him.

He then walked back down the hallway into the bedroom and lied back down. He did not say anything; he was too afraid to do anything because my dad may have heard about it later.

She then started gossiping on the phone, so much that she forgot about the boiling water. I returned to the living room to watch television and waited for my mom to pick me up. We all had to move out of the apartment after one of my cousins killed her husband in the living room. She was in jail just a short period of time because it was self-defense. However, that did not stop the neighbors from talking. So, it was time to move.

Moving

We moved almost every year, from Lamont Street to Harvard Street, to Girard Street, to Columbia Road, to Irving Street and so on, always in a similar neighborhood. The place might be quiet and peaceful before our family moves in, but not for long. In the late 60's and early 70's, children were allowed to go into the corner stores alone with a note from an adult. I would always go to the corner store with my note that said, "Peaches has permission to get cigarettes and a pickle." I would hand the note to the clerk and my money. I would get two Mary Jane candies for 2 cents.

One particular evening I was not allowed to go to the store. I was upset because I wanted to buy my candy but my dad told me to stay at home. The next morning I awoke to sounds of sirens and screaming neighbors crying. I jumped out of bed and ran downstairs. The family was in the living room talking about a little girl who was found in the dumpster. She was raped and murdered. My family was already pointing the finger at my dad because her shoe was found on top of our roof. My dad was a rapist and child molester, so of course he would be a suspect. But there was no proof that he did it. The

neighborhood was angry and scared. No one sent their children to the corner stores alone anymore. Soon it was time to move again. We moved every year, always in NW Washington D.C.

Family outings were not fun at all for me. People always seemed to focus on my complexion, not knowing the problems that it would cause in my house when we got home that evening. People would say, “Peaches has a beautiful complexion.” Then my dad would say ‘I do not know why she’s so light skin; I don’t make light-skinned children.’ And then some of my brother’s friends would ask him if I was his real sister. Of course my brother would get tired of hearing this and get upset. So, I would stay hidden during events trying not to be noticed. I did understand why this was such a big deal in the black community or why I needed to be the same dark complexion as my father. Why did my identity have to be questioned by my community because of my light complexion as opposed to my brother’s appearance? Why did this make me feel ashamed of who I was, wanting to be the same dark skin complexion as all my brothers? Why did my father hate light-skinned people? And why was I abused just because of the color of my skin?

The Scratched Face

On one particular day, I woke up and decided to sit on my porch to play with my popsicle sticks. I did not have toys, so I would glue popsicle sticks together to build things. I sat on the porch. This pretty girl with dark skin was walking down the street. In my mind, I believed she was coming to play with me. She walked up to the porch steps as I smiled at her, hoping to make a new friend. She walked up closer to me and paused

and stared at me for a few seconds. She said, “You think you are cute, don’t you?” I looked at this little girl confused as to why I would think that because my dad said that I was ugly. She then leaned forward and began to scratch up my face. I did not fight back. I just waited for her to finish. She then ran down the steps and back down the street and then she disappeared. I then ran into the house, up the stairs to the bathroom to wash the blood off my face. It stung badly but I wanted to hurry and go back outside to play with my popsicle sticks before my dad came home and took them from me.

Later that evening, when my mom came home from work, she had to hurry and fix dinner before my dad returned home. When my mom noticed the scratches on my face, she asked me to come closer to her.

She asked, “Peaches, what happen to your face?” I told her that the little girl down the street had scratched my face because she thought I was cute. My mom said, “That’s crazy!” She then continued preparing dinner before my dad came home. That was more important at the time as she had to keep peace in our house first.

Later that night my father came home and my mom told him about the scratches on my face. A typical father would have checked his child’s face to make sure his child was okay. However, my dad would never show us that he cared about his children. That would mean that he gave a damn about us. He instead called my cousin Renae and offered her five dollars to go down the street and beat up the girl for scratching my face.

I tagged along with my cousin to point out the little girl. It just so happened to be one of her friends that she played with. She did not care; she beat her up and then we walked back

down the street. Now I was allowed to go outside only when my cousin was outside. She was more like my bodyguard. Renae had always had this bad reputation of bullying girls and boys in the neighborhood. Everyone was afraid of her. Maybe there is something to this light skin/dark skin problem in our black community.

My Cousin and I

One night my cousin Renee and I decided to play skating on the kitchen floor using soap powder. It was late at night; everyone was in their bedroom watching television or sleeping, the perfect time for us to have fun. The house was made weird where the kitchen was in the basement. You would have to go down the side steps to get there, the perfect place for us to play while everyone's on the third floor. My cousin and I both started wetting the floor with soap and water, making it slippery. We were skating, laughing, and just having fun, being children. Then we heard the front door above us open and then close. Keys jingled and the sound of heavy footsteps whistled. We all knew the sound of my dad coming home because we all were terrified of him. My cousin looked at me in horror because she knew we would get a beating if he were to come down to the kitchen and see those suds.

Ten steps led down to the kitchen. We were both hoping that he would go up the stairs instead of down. We could hear him getting closer and closer. Both of us knew that he was walking down the steps. It was like torture hearing each footstep as he walked down the stairs. Once we could see the footsteps indeed belonged to my father, he looked at us with this evil stare while he stood frozen to the bottom step. He then said, "What the fuck are you all doing? And what is this shit on the floor?" My cousin and I were waiting for the other person to speak up and explain the suds on the floor.

We were crying, ready to get our whipping so that we could get it over with. He then looked at my cousin Renee and said, "I'm not going to whip your ass because you look like your mom too much." Her mother was his darker sister, to whom

he was very close. He then told her to go to bed. She dashed up the stairs looking back at me wondering why I was not following. I was still standing in the middle of the floor waiting for him to tell me to go to bed but I knew that I would not be that lucky. He then walked over closer to me and smacked me so hard in the face that I fell beneath the kitchen table, hitting my head on one of the chairs. He then pulled out a chair from underneath the table and sat down. He then told me to clean up every sud that was on the floor. I started crying because my head hurt and I hoped that I would not be molested that night. My cousin avoided my father's wrath because she looked like my father's sister (her mom) and they both were dark-skinned. You could almost get away with anything with my dad if you had a dark complexion. ALMOST ANYTHING.

The Memorable Yuletide

It was close to Christmas one year when my teacher gave all the students Christmas countdown calendars with chocolates hidden behind each day. One day I was in the living room sitting on the floor next to the Christmas tree playing with my calendar. I could hear the keys turning in the front door. I hoped that my father would not notice me sitting on the floor. I could hear his footsteps coming down the hallway wanting him to pass by the living room. I never looked up but I could tell he was standing close by. I heard his footsteps stop in the doorway. He then said, "I don't know why you're so happy? You're not getting a damn thing for Christmas!" He walked away and entered the kitchen looking for his dinner.

I continued playing with my calendar. I was not sad; I was used to him saying horrible things to me and I could always play with my younger brother's toys. My brothers were excited about Santa bringing toys but I could hear the arguments coming from my parents' bedroom about me getting something for Christmas. This time it was not about my complexion. I heard my mom say that it would not be right for me not to get any toys. Then the bedroom fell quiet. My brothers decided to go to bed early, thinking Santa would come to our house soon. So, we all went to bed.

CHRISTMAS HAD ARRIVED . . . I woke up and could hear my brothers downstairs playing with their toys. I jumped up and ran downstairs to play with my brothers. My mom came downstairs next. She looked tired as though she had been up all night. She then walked over to me and whispered in my ear telling me to look far behind the Christmas tree and get the unmarked present and hide it in my bedroom. Before I searched for my gift, I ran over to the hallway steps. I stood there for a few minutes trying to listen out for any movement upstairs, trying to see if my dad was still asleep. I then ran back into the living room and reached far behind the tree. I grabbed the unmarked wrapped gift and ripped it open. It was a red and green plaid skirt with a tag on it. I wished it was a doll instead but I knew dolls were forbidden. I ran up to my bedroom and hid it in my bottom drawer. I returned downstairs to finish playing with my brothers. Our dad eventually woke up and came downstairs. He did not speak to any of us. He just got his coffee and went back upstairs. Later that evening my dad found my gift and beat my mom for buying it. I do not know how he found out. Maybe one of my brothers told him because I did not say a word.

It was time for me to wash the dishes. My mom was at work and my brothers were upstairs. My dad came down for his dessert. I watched him firmly from the corner of my eye. He reached for a glass then put it up in the air looking for spots. He then sliced his pie and poured his milk into the glass. I hoped that he would hurry the hell back upstairs because I hated being in the same room with him. He then picked up the glass of milk and threw it in my face! I did not move once. I did not cry nor did I wipe the liquid from my face. I continued washing dishes. This made him angry; he started pulling plates out of all the cabinets telling me to wash them again. Then he walked upstairs with his pie. I was glad that I had to wash dishes all night. He would be asleep before I finished and I would not be molested that night.

The Sexual Abuse

The next morning I was sleeping light as usual. Any little noise would wake me up. My dad came into my room early in the morning. He snatched my blanket off of me in a forceful way as always, hoping to get a glance at my underwear. But I had learned to wear shorts underneath my nightgown. I could see in his eyes that he was not happy with my shorts, glaring at me as if he wanted to punch me in my face. He told me to get the fuck up and go to the corner store. I jumped out of bed. He told me that I did not need to wash my face or comb my hair and that no one was looking at my ugly ass for me to throw anything on.

He then left my room headed downstairs to sit in his favorite recliner. I was looking bad and trying not to cry. Then I thought maybe the neighbors were still asleep because

everyone that lived in the black neighborhood would sleep late on Saturdays. I could hear my father yelling telling me to get downstairs. I then walked downstairs and into the living room. My brothers were sitting on the floor watching cartoons and playing with their green army men toys.

My father told me to get some cereal and milk. I took the money and then walked out the door. As I walked down the street, I looked around hoping that no one was around. I looked up at each house window praying that no one could see me. I bought the food and then walked back home.

He took the bag and then told me to get some bread. I was not sure as to why I needed to return to the corner store, but I did. Walking back home, I held the bread very carefully because my dad hated smashed food. He would smack me on the floor if something were to be wrong with the bread. So, I carried it like I was holding a baby. When I arrived back at the house, he took the bread and told me to go back to the corner store to get some lard. He began to laugh. In that moment I knew he was trying to break me down. He got a kick out of humiliating me.

At this point I think the clerk knew something was wrong. Maybe the clerk knew that my dad was an evil man. He did rob corner stores often. The clerk told me to pick any candy bar I wanted. I looked around and picked up a Clark bar. I then grabbed the grocery bag. I sauntered to my house eating my candy. I did not care who saw me. The joke was on my dad. I got home and he was done playing his sick game. I then went upstairs to draw until it was time for us to wash the walls.

After a while it was time for us to move again. We moved to this white apartment building on Seat Pleasant St. The

apartment was okay but we would have to step over people on the stairways to get to your apartment. Our dad was in jail again; for what reason I did not know. So, my mother had to work two jobs while I took care of my brothers. I remember one night when our mom was at her night job. I had to find something in the kitchen to feed my brothers. The only thing I could find was a can of onion soup and some cornmeal. I decided to warm up the onion soup and try to make the bread that my mom cooked on top of the stove. We called it “whole cake bread.” I figured that I could do it. It was just flour and water, right? How hard could it be? I cooked the bread but it was nasty. The soup was awful as well but we ate it all the same. While sitting at the table, I could hear someone turning our front door knob. Someone was trying to break into the apartment but I could not call the police because of our family rules. I ran over to the door where I could see a silhouette of a man. The top of the door was Plexiglass. You could see out but they could not see through. He kept trying to push the door. I ran into the kitchen, gathered up my brothers, took them to the bedroom, put them to bed and closed the bedroom door.

I then ran back to the front door; I sat at the bottom of the door thinking this was going to keep the man out. The man finally went away. I sat there the whole night waiting for my mom to come home from her night job. Mom returned hours later. Hearing the key turning in the door woke me up. She came in the door with leftover food from her job for us to eat. I told her I had already given my brothers onion soup. I also told her that a man tried to break into the apartment. She said, “Peaches, that’s not good to eat the soup plain like that! Don’t give them that anymore.” She was more upset about me giving my brothers the soup than about the man trying to break in.

Soon Dad was out of jail again but he took the rent money; we were about to be evicted. Our parents were not home, so the maintenance men used their keys to enter the apartment. They threw everything out on the sidewalk, not caring that young children were home alone and crying. Our parents returned home and noticed everything had been thrown outside. My dad told me to watch everything while they found a truck. I stood on the sidewalk trying to watch our belongings. People started coming from nowhere, grabbing anything they could carry. People were driving up taking anything they could get into their cars. I started crying because I knew that I would be blamed for it. I just knew I was going to get a whipping.

My parents returned a short while later. People started to run away but most of our things were already gone. Our belongings now looked like trash. I was still crying when my dad walked over to me and smacked me so hard that I fell into the street. My mom just looked and said nothing. People yelled out from their windows cursing my dad out for hitting me. They were calling him all kinds of names. We gathered up what was left of our things and moved into this house nearby, a tiny shack. However, we did not stay there too long.

I remember coming home from school one day. As I walked into the kitchen, I could hear something moving above my head. I walked toward the hallway to listen carefully to a sound coming from the attic. I walked over to the pantry and stood on the shelf opening the attic to check out the sound. It was my cousin Lenny hiding from the police. His head peeped out and he put his finger to his lips, as to tell me to be quiet. I climbed down and walked into the kitchen to finish making my mayonnaise sandwich before my dad got home. That was the only thing on my mind.

When my dad came home, I told him that my cousin was hiding in the attic. My dad ran over to the attic and looked up and saw my cousin. He started cursing. He said, “Man, how the fuck did you get in here?” Then my dad started running around closing all the curtains. He made all of us stay upstairs. But he made me fix my cousin a sandwich and Kool-Aid. He looked out of the window all night. The police were parked across the street watching our house; they had a feeling that my cousin was in our house.

Where else would he be? My dad was a criminal. He robbed stores all the time. He shot at people all the time. He was a suspect in rape cases. Why shouldn't they stop at our house? My dad was the neighborhood thug. The police did not know that my dad was the person that had fired back at them weeks ago because he ran home with bullet holes in his maxi coat; he asked his sister to come and check for bullet holes on his body. He was also the man who had robbed a corner store and took a jar of pickles with him. My dad loved pickles. He was the robber they called the “Pickle Bandit”. When my mom finally came home, my dad had to tell her about the police outside watching our house.

Later that night I could hear my dad trying to convince my cousin to turn himself in before he ended up getting killed. Most importantly, my dad was not happy with police watching his every move. I do not know where my dad took him, but he was gone the next day. We later moved to Arkansas Ave NW Washington D.C. It was a beautiful, clean house with wood floors on the corner of an alley. It had a flat roof where you could climb out of the window and sit down, which I did often. The only problem was rats from the alley that came into the house at night. The rats would walk up the stairs as though

they were collecting rent. I was about ten years old at that time. A mousy little girl who played the record player all day. My favorite songs were “Blue Suede Shoes” by Elvis Presley and “Dock of the Bay” by Otis Redding. That was my enjoyment. And my dad was in jail . . . again!

One evening my cousin Malinda had to babysit my brothers and me while the family went to Marshall Hall for the day, I think to gamble. But no one warned her about the rats at night. That night my cousin and I were at the top of the stairs sitting on top of the railing. I could hear the rats making their way up the stairs. My cousin did not recognize the sound. As they reached the top stair, she screamed and began to run toward the bathroom, knocking me down on the floor. As I lied on my back, I had to be very still as the rats jumped over me. As soon as the last rat ran past me, I got up and ran to the bedroom and went to bed. She never watched us again!

Dad is out of jail, again. The last time he was in prison, he came out a Muslim for two months, not eating pork. Then after two months, he was eating my mom’s favorite smothered pork chops. We knew that was not going to last long. He only joined the Muslims in prison for protection because people were after him for raping a woman. I did not know what had happened this time because he started getting a perm and I had to roll his hair up every night with pink sponge rollers. I hated it. I hated being close to him, let alone touching him. He would ask me questions about my mom. He wanted to know how many men were in our house while he was in jail. He was a master manipulator trying to force me into saying that she was cheating on him. She was too afraid to even talk to a man because she feared the abuse that would follow. As he tried to pressure me into admitting to anything, I made the mistake of

saying the only man who came by was the landlord to collect the rent. That night he beat my mom so badly that she had to wear dark shades to work again. Still, he continued to rape me more often now that my mom was working late nights.

One night he came to my bedroom and snatched me out of bed by my nightgown. He twisted the top of my gown so tight that I could feel his knuckles underneath my chin. I could see his gun is in his left hand. He walked me down the hallway toward my parent's bedroom. As we walked down the hallway, I peeped into my brothers' bedroom. It looked as though they were asleep. We continued walking down the hall. I told my dad that I needed to go to the bathroom. He released the grip on my nightgown. And said, "Okay, hurry up! I ambled down the hallway looking back to see if my dad was watching me. I did not see him, so I ducked into my brothers' bedroom. I tried to wake up my oldest brother. He did not wake up, or he was afraid to. I then tried to wake up my next to oldest brother. He looked down at me confused. I told him to please help me! I asked him, "Can you please, call the police?" I then ran out of their bedroom before my dad began to look for me. I started back down the hallway to my parent's bedroom, knowing that the police would be there to save me from this evil man and that he would be in jail for a long time. I entered the bedroom where I was raped viciously. I went into my coping mechanism and blanked out. When I came back to reality, I was sitting on the toilet seat with my dad standing next to me, not knowing how I got there or why I was on the toilet. I then went to my bedroom to go to sleep. The police never came. My brother was too afraid to call.

The next morning I sat in the tub crying from the pain in my vagina. I called for my mom to come into the bathroom;

she ran in. I told her to look at my vagina; it seemed split, and it hurt. She never asked me why and I was afraid to tell her why. My dad was standing outside the bathroom listening to our conversation. My mom did not want to get beat up again. So she left me in the bathroom alone and went to work.

We then had to move to 18 Street N.E Washington D.C. At the time I was eleven years old in the 6th grade attending a school named Ruth K Webb Elementary School. We lived in an excellent house next to this red brick apartment building with only about eight units and three levels. It was a tightly squeezed block where everyone could see the neighbors coming and going. Each house shared a wall but it was unusual for us to live this close to other people. People could hear my mom getting beat up, meaning people could now call the police on my dad. At least until he began to threaten to kill them.

I enjoyed my school. I was getting good at combing my matted hair because no one was allowed touch my hair, not even my mom. I still wore secondhand clothes but they were clean. My teacher's name was Mr. C.W. He was very popular with the female teachers. He wore this huge afro and a big smile; he wore his shirt halfway opened with this chain dangling from his neck. He would walk down the school hallway like a super fly. On my first day of school, I was nervous to be around new people. I think my teacher knew how shy I was. He told me to sit at the front of the class so that he could watch me. I enjoyed being in school away from home because it was always a good thing for me. Before the bell would ring at the end of the school day, we had to line up next to the classroom window. The bell would ring and each student had to leave out the door one by one. But the weird

thing was that I would have to be the last student in line. As I would exit the classroom, my teacher would always kiss me in my mouth every time. I am not saying that my teacher was a predator like my dad. I know evil and he was not evil. He was kind to me.

I remember starting my menstruation cycle in class. I did not know what it was. No one had told me about it. I got up from my seat one day in class and my teacher noticed a red spot on the back of my pants. He quickly grabbed his sweater from his chair and wrapped it around my waist. I had no idea why he would do that. I did not understand. I thought that I was in some trouble because he told me to follow him. As we both walked down the hallway, he began to tell me about the stain on my pants. I looked at him confused. He said, “Karen, you’ve come on your menstruation; you need to go home.” Because I still confused looked confused, he said, “No one has ever explained this to you?” I answered, “NO!”

We walked into the office and he walked over to the nurse. They were whispering about me. The nurse then looked over at me and smiled. They both walked over to me to inform me that they would try to call my mom. Then the nurse took me to the nurse’s office to get cleaned up. My teacher walked me out of the building. He walked me halfway down the street and told me to keep his sweater and that he would see me tomorrow. I went home but never mentioned anything to my mom. I kept it to myself. I did not want to be in trouble for having my menstruation. A month later my dad told my mom about my menstruation. He was always looking through my things when I was not around. He must have been checking my underclothes in the hamper, trying to time when he could rape me. I had no privacy at all. I was not even allowed to lock

the bathroom door. Nevertheless, my mom took me to the store to buy sanitary napkins for the next month.

There was a camping trip coming up at my school soon. I was always excited to get away from home but I did not know if my dad was going to let me go. However, my mom signed the permission slip. I then started to pack even though the trip was two weeks away; I was so excited. I began to fold all of my secondhand clothes to prepare for a weekend away from that terrible house. On the day of the camping trip, everyone stood on the side of the curb with their suitcase waiting for the school bus. We jumped on the bus when it arrived. After about a two-hour drive, we arrived to the camping ground in no time. We all exited the school bus and headed to the orientation room. They assigned four girls to each room and then kitchen duties. I was assigned kitchen patrol. Then they told us to report to our rooms to unpack and come back for a welcome party in the recreation room. The three girls and I ran back to our dorm to empty out our suitcases and then we headed back to the party.

The recreation center was decorated like a carnival celebration. The first thing the girls and I saw was this sign upstairs that read “Kissing Booth” with chocolate kisses candy signs. People told us that you would go into this dark room where someone would tell you to open your mouth and then put chocolate kisses in your mouth. We all ran up the stairs to get in line for the candy. I was next in line. I walked into this dark room where I could barely see anything but I could see that there was a tall silhouette of a man. I could hear him telling me to keep coming forward. As he grabbed my hand to help me along the way, he told me to open my mouth for my

candy. He then kissed me in my mouth and put the candy in my hand instead.

I then exited the room confused as to what had just happened. This stranger had just kissed me in my mouth! I began to walk down the stairs to meet up with my friends. They all had candy in their mouths. My candy was still in my hand. I was waiting for someone to say that that man had kissed them in their mouth too. No one said a word. I then looked up to the booth. This tall white man looked down at me as he smiled. I ran so far away from that booth. I started wondering why I was always targeted by pedophiles. What was it that I did to be put in this position? Needless to say, I never went camping ever again.

Back at school I was no longer my teacher's favorite. There was this new girl in our classroom. She was the same height as our teacher. She looked like she had repeated the 6th grade five times. She was enormous and the kids were afraid of her. Because she could not fit into the standard classroom seats, she had to sit at the teacher's desk. Even though she had somewhat of a soft voice, she bullied everyone at the school but I was not afraid of her; she did not bother me. After a couple of months, she was no longer in our classroom. Rumors started spreading that she made a boy get her shoe out of the pond in the arboretum and he drowned. We never saw her in our class again.

Eventually graduation time came. Our school pictures had already arrived. My teacher cut out one of my photos and placed it on his desk. I then brought them home to my mother. My mother and I went to the store to purchase my first brand new dress and shoes for graduation. I saw this pretty blue and

white checkered dress and white stacked heel shoes. I told my mom I wanted the dress and shoes and she bought them for me. I hurried home to try on my new dress and shoes. However, I was not that excited anymore because the dress felt hard and smelled funny. My old dresses were softer. Even my new shoes were stiff. I did not like the feel of them but I liked the shine. On the night before the graduation, I decided to try to roll up my hair. All the other girls were getting their hair pressed but I knew that no one was allowed to make me look pretty. I decided that I would try to fix my own hair. I was not even sure if my mom was coming to my graduation. I knew my dad wasn't. He would never be a part of anything good for me but I did not care. He would just mess up my whole day anyway.

I woke up early in the morning to get ready for my graduation. I hurried to put on my new clothes so that I could get to school early. While my mom did not help me get dressed, I was quite sure she was instructed not to. I decided to walk to school in my graduation outfit because I knew my dad was not going to give me a ride to school. It was hard walking in those stacked heels but I was proud of myself. I was so happy that I did an excellent job on my hair. I walked into the school knowing that I may be alone but I was okay. I sat down in the auditorium waiting for my name to be called. As my name was called to come up on the stage, I heard no one cheering for me. But I still smiled as I reached for my diploma. I started walking down the aisle, searching to see my mom's face. As I walked all the way to the end and was about to sit down, my mom appeared from the back row and snapped a picture of me. I was happy to see her, hoping that my father would not abuse her for coming here. After the graduation, we

both walked back home. Even though I did not receive any gifts for graduation, it was okay. I kept my new clothes on all day.

The next day I sat on the porch watching people walk by. This high school girl walked by my house. Her name was Lisa. She was a beautiful girl with dark skin, long black hair, a big smile with a gap between her teeth, a deep laugh, and a walk that caused her to switch from side to side. All of the guys on the block wanted her. She was beautiful and she knew it. She lived in the red brick apartments next to our house on the right. She lived in the apartment on the first floor.

She lived with her sister in this small but cute apartment. When you first walked through the door, you would be in the living room. She had decorated beads separating the living from the dining area. The bedroom was on the right side where she had bunk beds. This is where we would spend time together watching television. She would take me everywhere with her. She said that I was her new little sister. When she would try and comb my hair, I would tell her that my dad would not like anyone touching my hair. She said that she did not care and would try to keep my hair neat. Every time she would see me on the porch, she would come over to get me.

Soon she had this new boyfriend named Eli; he was handsome, tall and slim and had this huge afro. He looked like Michael Jackson. He and Lisa looked charming together. He hated that I was always tagging along with them. Even though Lisa knew it, she did not care one bit. On their prom night, I sat on my porch watching them take pictures. They looked so good together in their all white. Just like movie stars!

Lisa noticed me watching and walked over to me and said “Peaches, come take pictures with me.” I stood up confused as to where we were going. She put me in the limo along with them. I could see that her boyfriend was not happy about it but I tagged along anyway. Once we arrived at the school, she grabbed my hand and sat me down at a table. I watched people dance for about three hours and then we returned home. My parents never knew that I was gone. She later broke up with Eli.

I met a new friend who lived in the same building who resided above Lisa. Her name was Cathy; she lived with both parents and her brother. She was brown skinned and tall. Her parents were never home. They would leave her and her brother for days at a time. Because their parents liked to gamble, they left them home alone often.

They had very little food in their apartment, so I would take things from my house and give it to them. If there was food in the house, it would always be “chitterlings”. They ate those often. Cathy and I spent our time playing together because she was closer to my age. I began to play with her more as I was just learning how to trust people at the time. However, we could not live in that neighborhood anymore because my dad believed the landlord liked my mother. He told us to start punching holes in all the walls of the house before we moved out that day.

Fighting Back

After moving to Linden Street NE Washington D.C., the abuse continued. Living there became a turning point in my life. I started talking back and getting the courage to fight back.

Even my brothers were getting older and we all were tired of our dad fighting our mom. One evening one of my youngest brothers and I decided to kill my dad. We knew where he kept all of his guns in the house. We waited until he was drunk and fell asleep. While I stayed outside of the bedroom door as the lookout person, my brother crawled into the bedroom and onto our dad's side of the bed. He slowly stood up with the gun in his hand, aimed it at our dad's face, and pulled the trigger. The gun had jammed! Our mom woke up and looked around, frantically asking, "Who is that?" My brother fell back to the floor and crawled out of the bedroom. Even though our dad had lived to see another day, I tried to stay as far away from him as possible. I stayed outside all day until it was time to come into the house.

I met a friend on the same block name Rhee; she was pretty, dark-skinned and short. She lived in the green house down the street. She lived with her mother, sister and three brothers. The rumors had started that my dad was slipping out of their back door at night because he was sleeping with her mother. When I finally got up the nerve to ask my friend about the rumor, she confirmed that my dad was sleeping with her mother but she was afraid to tell me. I ran home to tell my mom. My mom was in the kitchen cooking dinner as I walked into the kitchen. I had blurted out that my dad was sleeping with my friend's mom down the street. My mom looked at me with this very evil look as though I had done something wrong. She said, "He is with me." I then looked at her with disgust and walked out of the house. I never told her about anything I heard about my dad ever again. She always knew but could not do a damn thing about it.

My friend and I were never close after that. I eventually met a new girlfriend from around the corner; she lived on C Street. Her name was Sharon and she was soft-spoken, very slim. She lived in this house with both parents and she had a lot of sisters and brothers. She was my first best friend.

She had insecurities about her weight and would be jealous of me at times. We would go to drug stores looking for weight gain drinks. She would eat a gallon of ice cream every day trying to gain weight. She did not like the attention that I received from the boys. Sometimes she would tell me to keep my coat on and I did because she was my friend.

She also had a terrible habit of lying about me to her mother. She would tell her mom that she was with me but instead she would be out with a guy. Her mom thought that I was a bad influence on her daughter, which was not true at all. When I would see my girlfriend, her mom and dad would look at me as though I were the troublemaker. Whenever she got a boyfriend, she made sure that they would not like me. Her boyfriend would meet me and then roll his eyes for no reason. I had no clue of all the lies she told other people about me but I did not care. I continued to be her friend.

One evening I went around the corner to visit Sharon. I walked up to the front door. Her youngest brother stood in the doorway and I asked him if his sister was home. He said, "Yes, she is down in the basement." Having never been in their basement before, I proceeded to go down the basement stairs; her brother followed behind me. He then locked the door behind him. I then turned around to run back up the steps trying to reach for the knob. He then blocked me from moving up any further. I then ran down the steps again hoping that

someone was down there. I could tell that this was his bedroom. No one was down there; he had lied to get me down here. He began to start taking off his clothes while chasing me around. I then jumped over one of the beds and made my way back up the basement stairs. I unlocked the door and ran out. One of their oldest sisters was standing in the dining room. She turned around and looked at me and laughed; she then said, "Peaches, what are you doing down there with my brother?" I refused to answer her. I just ran out of their house. I called my best friend to tell her what had happened. Thank God she believed me.

Days later her brother began to tell lies about us having sex in his basement. He was bragging about it around the neighborhood. He only did that because the boys around the block said that it was hard to get my number. That lie spread around for a long time. All that I could do was hope that it would disappear soon. One day I decided to go around the corner to visit my friend. One of her oldest brothers' girlfriend had come up to me and asked me if I had left a hair pin in her boyfriend's bed. Her boyfriend had told her that it was mine to cover up his cheating on her. I told his girlfriend that it was not mine and that they were lying. I doubt she believed me. It seemed like a lot of people just loved to lie about me for no damn reason at all. I decided to walk back home before I missed my curfew. I walked very fast because I had about ten minutes to get there.

On the walk back home, I noticed a group of boys from my neighborhood on my block. One of them was my next-door neighbor. He was this stocky guy who was bowlegged and talked between his teeth and had long fingernails. I was nervous because I had to pass by them to get to my house. I

could not cross the street because they had already seen me coming. I did not like attention from boys; I just wanted to feel invisible.

I walked fast hoping not to bring attention to myself. Then the boy who lived next door to me asked for my phone number. I pretended not to hear him. He then said it louder trying to impress the other boys in the crowd. I then said “No” as I tried to pass him. The guys started laughing at him. Feeling embarrassed, he walked up to me and punched me on the side of my eye. My eye began to bleed as I grabbed my eye. The other guys started to curse him out saying things like, “Man, why did you hit that girl? What the fuck you do that for?” He realized that it was not funny anymore when I began to run into my house. Trying not to miss my curfew, I ran into the bathroom to clean off the blood. I got ready for school the next day never mentioning it to anyone. Word got back to my dad about the incident but he did not do anything about it because he was sleeping with one of the boy’s family members. He did not want to mess that up.

The boy next door and I eventually became friends and he started throwing a lot of basement parties and invited me to them. I could not believe that we still lived on Linden St. N.E and I still had the same friends. But my friends and I were doing stupid teenager things at that point. One day it was my turn to use my house for skipping school. We would pretend to go to school in the morning and meet each other on the corner. My friends and I had walked back to my house and started doing each other’s hair and making a sandwich, just killing time until school ended that day. Then we heard keys turning in the front door. I knew the dreaded sound of my dad’s keys. We then ran into the kitchen pantry to hide from my dad.

I could hear him whistling as usual. We were scared to death that he was going to come into the kitchen and open the pantry. But he decided to go upstairs and take a shower. We then snuck out of the front door. We then decided to catch the bus on H Street NE to downtown until school ended. We walked around doing window shopping on F Street where my mom worked at a place called Vita Foods. I was not worried about my mom seeing me. She had never whipped me a day in my life and she would not tell on me either.

While walking around the corner from my mom's job, I ran right into my dad. We almost bumped shoulders. I almost urinated on myself. He stopped in his tracks and looked at me with this evil look on his face. He said, "Go the fuck home, Peaches!" My friends and I ran to the bus stop and hopped on the bus. They were laughing but I was trying to figure out a way to survive this smack in my face and its dreaded punishment. I went home and cleaned the whole house, not that this would save me. However, my dad was downtown spying on my mom trying to see if she was talking to any guy at work. He had sent my mom flowers to her job anonymously just to see if she would tell him about the flowers. She did not tell him and that was a big mistake. Later that afternoon, I could hear my parents walking up to the front door. My brothers were still outside. We all liked to stay away from the house until it was time to enter that hell hole. I waited in the bedroom waiting for my punishment but my dad was more focused on the flowers that he had sent to my mom. I could hear my mom telling him that she knew it was him playing a game on her. He did not believe her and gave her two black eyes and she still went to work the next day. As for me, I was

punished for two weeks. I could not go outside or talk to my friends on the phone.

First Love Experience

When I turned fifteen, I attended Dunbar High School, the school with no walls and ramps. I met my first boyfriend there. I would have never thought that I would be able to trust a guy that was not my brother. It was a new beginning for me. I was standing outside of the school talking to my best friend, Sharon, when he first walked by and smiled at me. He was bowlegged with a part down the middle of his head and he wore a beige trench coat. He was a senior that attended school just for half of the day because he worked. I did not smile back; I looked down at the ground. At the time I was still timid and wondered why he liked me out of all the girls standing by the wall. My friends began to tease me about him.

The next day I bumped into him in the hallway. He began to follow me and asked me for my phone number. I said no and started to walk away. I could not wait to tell Sharon that he had asked me for my number. He began following me everywhere at school. When he asked me for my phone number again, I gave it to him. We began to talk on the phone every day. He even started coming to see me at my house. However, my brothers were overprotective of me and did not like him too much. When he came to visit, we just rode around in his car or went to his house, which was only a couple of blocks away. Who knew he lived that close to me? I would walk over to his house to visit him often. I remember his sister telling me that I came over too much. He then told her that his

girlfriend could come over anytime she wanted to. Did he say, girlfriend?

Soon we started dating but it was now time for us to move again! We moved to 2116 15th Good Hope Road S.E into a black and white house next to an alley, where someone could be robbed if they walked through the lane at night. I could see this happening from my window every night. I would regularly call the police. The robbers would lean the victim up against our house and take their money. By the time the cops arrived, no one would be around, so I stop calling. I did not like this home at all.

One day I was not allowed to use the house phone, so I decided to go to the phone booth across from the school. I would always cut through Ketcham Elementary schoolyard as the shortcut to my home. That night after talking to my friend, I noticed a very dark shadow jump back behind the schoolyard tree as I was walking through the schoolyard. Visibly, this man was waiting to attack whoever came through; unfortunately, it was me that night. I started walking backward slowly retracting my footsteps. When I got closer to the school gate, I turned around and ran as fast as I could in the other direction. I ran home and told my mom that a man was hiding in the schoolyard waiting to hurt someone. He could have been waiting to rape someone. Even though I did not like that neighborhood, I would not have been surprised if that was my dad hiding behind that tree waiting to rape someone because he was a serial rapist.

My brothers seemed to like our new neighborhood. They had a lot of friends there. As for me, I wanted to move back to Linden Street because I missed my boyfriend and my friends.

However, my dad had a new project now: spying on this lady who lived in a house across the street. She was pretty and light-skinned and I think she lived with her son. When I would pass by my parents' bedroom, he would be looking into her house with his binoculars watching every move she made. He would get dressed in the morning just to come outside when he knew she would be leaving for work trying to get her to notice him. There was a dark-skinned woman across the street who lived next to the alley that he was already cheating with. I would catch her in his van all the time. She tried to be my friend but I knew what she was doing. Our dad slept with the neighbors everywhere we lived, so it was not new to me.

Whenever he found a new admirer, my father would abuse my mother. One night I heard a lot of bumping noises coming from my parents' bedroom down the hallway. I worked up the nerve to run down there and slam the door open. He was punching my mom in the face. I just snapped and ran toward him and started hitting my dad in his face with all the strength I had and screaming for him to leave her the fuck alone. He began to smile and he started punching me in my face. I did not feel his punches that much because I was so angry and could block out the pain. I could hear my mom telling him to stop hitting me. He then pushed me out of the bedroom, locked it, and continued to beat her more. I then returned to my bedroom waiting for my punishment. A half an hour later, my mom walked into my room and told me to pack my clothes because I had to leave the house. I wrapped my things and went to live with my cousin. Living with my extended family was not any better. You would have to kiss their asses and go by their rules just to get along with them. Months later, I would be allowed back into the house. I found a pole outside and hid

it behind the refrigerator waiting for the next time my dad wanted to beat someone.

One evening my parents were in the kitchen arguing over money. My dad had probably lost a bet and needed to pay someone. Mom told him that she did not have any money. So he walked upstairs to get his gun. I heard everything, watching everything from the stairs. He then fired his gun at my mom in the kitchen. The bullets ricocheted off the kitchen pole. My mom ran out the back door. I then lost it; I ran to the dining room and reached behind the refrigerator to get my pole. I then ran into the kitchen and swung this pole as hard as I could. I tried to knock the shit out of him. He looked at it and ducked then he looked at me in fear. He ran out of the back door like my mom had done earlier. In that moment I knew that he was just a punk with a gun.

I wanted to see the look on my mom's face, seeing my dad run out of the same door that she had ran out of. I then went upstairs waiting for them to come back into the house, and for me to be told to get out again. Nothing happened that night. Everyone went to bed. I woke up that morning hearing my dad on the phone telling his mom about the incident that night. I heard him laughing and saying, "That bitch is crazy! I should have killed her; yeah, I should have killed her." He was now watching my every move and I was waiting for him also.

I caught the bus to Linden St. every chance I got to see my friends. My boyfriend picked me up every chance he got. I tried to stay away from that crazy house as often as I could. When I became pregnant, I told only my girlfriend about it but I could not hide it for too long. I think my dad knew because he continuously searched through my things when I was not at

home. He probably still searched through my dirty clothes to keep up with my period. That's how nasty he was. Around this time I started to get sick and I asked my mom to take me to the doctor. She did not take me right away; she waited about two months before she decided to help me. Now they knew I was pregnant and my household chores increased. Washing walls, waxing floors, making all the beds, cleaning out the refrigerator every Friday, washing clothes at the laundry mat. However, I did not care; I loved cleaning. One evening I went over to my boyfriend's house and stayed until morning. When I got home, my dad told me to pack up and leave. I went to stay with my cousin who lived in NE. I stayed with her until I had my baby. My mom was not allowed to talk to me. When I called her, she would hang the phone up on me if my father was next to her.

Giving Birth as a Single Parent

The day I was in labor, I called my mother at work to tell her. I then called the ambulance. They wanted to deliver the child in my cousin's living room because they could see his head but I said no and crossed my legs and got into the ambulance. The next day my parents came to the hospital. My mom came into my room while my dad stayed in the doorway. He did not want to come in, which was fine with me. My mom asked me where the baby was. I told her that I would take them to my son. My dad then thundered, "No, we can go by ourselves!" They then left to see my baby but they never returned to my room afterward. I knew my mom probably wanted to but couldn't. Because my cousin worked in the maternity ward, I knew I had my cousin's support. I stayed at the hospital for as long as I wanted. I rested and then it was

time to try and figure out how to take care of this child, which I knew nothing about. The father of my child came to see us. He was proud. This was his family's first grandchild and his mom was excited. The day I got out of the hospital, I went over to her house. She said that the baby was her son and she took great care of her grandbaby. This would be the luckiest child ever having her as his grandmother. I was now back at my cousin's house with my new son. A few days later my parents showed up out of nowhere. My mom told me to pack my things and get in the car. My dad then carried the baby out to the car. I put my stuff into the back of the car before getting in. My dad never looked my way or said anything to me; we just drove home. I went into my bedroom with my baby and stayed in the room the whole day. My mom never even came into the room to help me with the baby. I was quite sure that she wanted to but she just couldn't. My brothers came to the room to see their nephew but I could feel the tension in the house. I could only imagine all the things that went on while I was gone.

My son's grandmother called me every day to teach me how to take care of him. A month later, she decided to keep my son for a few weeks. My parents told me to get him back. I think they were just jealous because someone was helping me take care of my son. My son stayed home with me on the weekends. He was two years old now. He mostly stayed with his grandmother at his father's house because of the unstable life I lived. He would be sitting at the dining room table waiting for me to fix his cereal and I would pour his milk into his bowl and start to walk over to the refrigerator to put the milk back. My dad would come down the steps and say to me, "You don't buy shit in here." He then would smack my son's

bowl of cereal on the floor just as my son began to put the spoon in his mouth.

One particular day I just snapped and said, “HELL NO! You are not going to start treating my son like you treat us motherfucker!” He then charged at me trying to hit me. All the while my son is crying for his cereal and my brother is in the living room instructing me where to run. My brother said, “Peaches, run around here! Go here! He’s coming this way!” My son was crying and I got tired of running, so I stopped. My father told me to get out of the house and I did. I took my son with me to my aunt’s house, my father’s sister. She welcomed us with open arms because she knew what kind of brother she had. It was a beautiful place for my son. They all loved him there. We lived there for a year before returning home.

After my oldest brother came home from the Army, he became more confident in standing up for himself. Eugene was stronger and ready to take on whatever came his way because he was prepared to defend his family. We all were older now and our dad knew that it was only a matter of time before we all stood our ground and whipped his ass. Only a case of time! But we all knew the rules in the house: never touch our dad’s dessert!

One evening Eugene decided he wanted a piece of dad’s pie. He was sitting in the living room watching television and enjoying the last slice of pie when our dad walked into the house. When my dad glanced into the living room and looked over to my brother, he asked him if he was eating his pie. My brother gave him this look as to say “NOT TODAY” and then he said, “Yeah!” Our dad walked over to him and then said, “Motherfucker you don’t eat the last of anything in this

house!” Our dad then punched my brother in the face. My brother put his plate down slowly and then grabbed our dad by the collar and body slammed him down to the floor. He then sat on his chest and began to choke him. My brother then said, “You’ll need to hit me harder than that! You Bitch!” I could hear my mom screaming, “Get off your dad! Let him up!” My brother decided to let go of his neck. When he got up, he stood there waiting for our dad to get up and try to fight him.

Our dad got up with this look of defeat on his face, something we had never seen before. He then ran up the stairs; we all knew what came after that. He needed his gun. We all were in the living room trying to figure out how to save our brother from being shot. Our dad then ran back down the stairs and pointed the shotgun at my brother’s face. As my brother turned to run out the door, you could hear the clicking sound of the gun. My brother Darnell ran out in front of our brother trying to shield him from getting shot. He knew our dad would not shoot him because he looked just like him (he has a very dark complexion like our dad). He would never fire at him. When our dad saw that Darnell jumped in front of Eugene, he then quickly raised the shotgun up in the air. He said, “Motherfucker, you crazy? I almost shot your dumbass.” He then said, “If you want to save your brother. You can get out with him.” Both brothers left the house that night. They slept on a bench down the street, probably laughing the whole night.

The next morning my brothers walked up to the house trying to get back in. Our dad pointed his gun out of the front door and said to them, “If your asses come back in, you better have some sense because I will have no problem killing either one of you!” For the rest of the day, we laughed so hard at our

brother body slamming our dad and the defeated look on his face. Priceless! Like I said . . . a punk with a gun!

Eventually my brothers and I moved out. My mom would not talk to me if I called when my dad was around, so I lost contact with them for about ten years. At the time I had three boys, a job, my own place, and a brand new car. But distrust followed me throughout my adulthood. Attracting boyfriends who disrespected me, cheated on me, and even talked about me behind my back. I almost followed in my mom footsteps by letting men think they could get away with treating any way they wanted. But I stood my ground through it all. I could now take care of myself.

The Terror Passed On

Over time the family started communicating again. Our dad worked at the Convention Center in Washington D.C. working with the forklifts. Whenever he worked on a show, he liked to brag about all the big money he made and how he gave his kids and dark-skinned grandkids money all the time. He would not give me any money, which I did not mind because I would never take a dime from him. The only thing I worried about was whether he had stopped raping women and molesting little girls.

One evening as he bragged about his money, he mentioned having to babysit a movie star's kids. He said that he had to babysit them in his van while the star was filming. While I cannot mention the star's name, I can tell you he was a new superhero actor who was dark complexioned and bald.

Listening to him tell this story made me sick to my stomach. I prayed to God that he never touched the children now that he was sick and had diabetes and was on his way out. While he was in the hospital, the family visited him, except me of course; I would never. During one of his sister's visits to the hospital, he became angry with her and threw his cup of urine on her because he did not want people seeing him at his weakest point. He even cursed at all the nurses. He knew that he did not have much time left to live.

After the hospital sent my father home, he started confessing about some of the things he had done back in the day. He mentioned the time he was cheating with a married woman. The husband came home while they were in the bedroom, so he had to jump out of the window. He was angry that he had hurt his ankle.

That night at the club, the husband walked in and put a gun to my dad's head but his friends grabbed the gun out of his hand. They then decided to kidnap the husband and put him in the trunk of the car. My dad then opened up the truck and shot the man in the neck and killed him. The guy was never seen again. He then talked about people owing him money. He would go to their house with his gun and threaten to kill them if they did not have it. He talked short of killing a little girl, only saying that God took my sister who had died at a young age. He then moved on to another subject.

You could tell that he was trying to get things off of his chest but did not want to say too much. The only things he said were that he killed, he was a D.C. informant, he robbed stores and banks, he sold guns, and he was a hitman himself. Most things he took to his grave when he died in his sleep at home.

However, he did keep a brown briefcase full of newspaper clippings because that's just what criminals do.

After my dad died, my mom called everyone to tell us the news. My brothers and I were happy that he died before our mom did so that she could know what it truly felt like to be free. I did not want to help with the funeral arrangements. I did not want to hear about him ever again; but, of course, she needed \$1,500.00 from me to bury him. I had to help my mom, so I gave it to her. My oldest brother and I did not want to go to his funeral. He did not want to carry his casket either. I had to watch my mom cry over my father as though he was a wonderful man. Maybe she was faking it; I still do not know.

People from my father's job at the Convention Center said all these kind words about him. I asked myself just who was this guy they were speaking about. This man was a monster. Did they know that he robbed the neighborhood stores; that he rode around looking for people to rape? He had terrorized his entire family. I just wanted to put this man in the ground so that we could heal from this terrible nightmare.

As life went on, I decided to become an advocate for sexually abused children. I wanted to be a voice for those that feared they did not have one. Now let's discuss the taboo of abuse in the black community. Let's start encouraging our children to "TALK."

COLORISM



A sad thing in life is to grow up without parents. But the most unfortunate thing is to grow with the ones that either abuse you or lend deaf ears to your cries that result from defilement. My father was an abusive man and he was unapologetically wicked and persistent with it. He used every ounce of his strength to make life a living hell for me just because I had a skin color he detested. Colorism was the main cause of my childhood and teenage throes and woes. I am sure I was not brought into the world on my own accord and most certainly did not alter my melanin to make my skin color different from those that my father preferred. Colorism ate deep into my happiness and twisted it from the inside out. Now, having read my story, what do you know about colorism?

Many people often have complicated ideas about colorism. Most of them do not usually grasp its true meaning before blindly basing their beliefs on assumptions. However, an encouraging number of people have substantial knowledge about it. Some have been able to identify that it is a form of racism, while others recognize that it relates to the inhumane treatment some people receive because of their melanin levels.

Further research defines colorism as discrimination based on skin color and prejudice in which humans have treated

racism differently on the social depiction associated with their skin color. Alice Walker coined the term colorism in 1982 but it was not necessarily a synonym for racism. Race depends on multiple of factors, including ancestry; therefore, racial categorization does not solely rely on skin color. Skin color is only one mechanism used to assign individuals to an ethnic category but race is a set of beliefs and assumptions assigned to a particular class. Racism is the dependence of social status on the social meaning attached to race; colorism is the dependence of the social state of skin color alone. For a form of discrimination to be considered colorism, differential treatment must not result from racial categorization but social values associated with the skin.

Colorism explains why my father wreaked havoc on my existence, coupled with the fact that I had pedophilic advances and moves that I had to endure as well. Being subject to colorism and pedophilia was not at all close to coping. It was pre-Armageddon for my little self. But what is pedophilia?

PEDOPHILIA



According to Wikipedia, a pedophile is a severe psychiatric disorder which involves an adult or older adolescent experiencing dominant, primary as well as exclusive central sexual attractions to prepubescent children. It goes further to say that although girls will likely begin the puberty process at the age of 10 or 11 and boys at age 11 or 12 the criteria for the pedophilia cutoff point could be prepubescence to age 13. A person having this disorder is called a pedophiliac or a pedophile, and he/she is usually 16 years old at the least and must be at least five or six years older than the prepubescent child before the attractions can be safely diagnosed as pedophilia. In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Doctors, pedophilia is termed pedophilic disorder. The manual then defines it as a kind of paraphilia which involves severe and consistent fantasies and sexual urge toward children who have not yet reached puberty, that have either been acted upon or which cause the person with the attraction some distress or interpersonal difficulty. The truth is, anyone can be a pedophile. There is no mark of the pedophiliac that you can see inscribed upon the foreheads of the affected persons walking the streets. Pedophiles are mostly solitary individuals or secretive ones. Just as the better lot uncover such a disorder and find ways to rehabilitate, another glory in it, some abuse children and blame it on the disease.

But in the end, are they really to blame? After all, they act on a twitch in their mental system and most often do not know how to repair the disconnection. My story surely should have given you some insight so that you now know what to believe about this disorder.

SPOTTING PEDOPHILES (National News Published 2013)



A pedophile can be anyone, as I said earlier. There is no mark on anyone's skin that identifies him or her as a child-loving maniac. But there are some groups of people that likely can be pedophiles. The way they act, relate and dress may give them away. All you need to do is be vigilant and sensitive enough to spot them. They include:

The Everyman

The everyman could be just about anyone. It could be that friendly neighbor or that classy colleague. It could be the delivery man or the neighborhood gardener. The everyman could just as well be that attentive shopkeeper. Those relatives of yours that are clamoring to get a chance to babysit your kids may become sheep in wolves' clothing. Sometimes they can go to unimaginable extents just to get an hour or two with your child when you are away at work or cheering at a football game.

Like every other thing in life, everyone is not created equal. The fact that someone might be a preacher in your sanctimonious church or an expensive time spender of a student-loving teacher does not mean the person cannot very well be a threat to the innocence of your child. Do not be fooled by the

person's outward respectability or importance in your community. That politician pulling ear-blowing crowds all over town is not too civil to be evil. Pedophiles are almost always men, more often married adult males that may work in an extensive range of occupations, from unskilled work up to corporate executive positions. They usually would prefer children in one specific age group, such as infants and toddlers, children between the ages of six and ten, or "teens" and young teenagers up to the age of sixteen. This goes by far to say that each pedophile has a scale of preference with which he selects the best target. However, female pedophiles also walk the earth. They are often hard to spot because women are attracted to cute kids. One cannot discern a female pedophile from a kind lady unless they are caught red-handed. Looking out for the persons that relate better to children than to adults and have either very few adult friends or whose friends might also be sex offenders can save you and your children from disaster. While pedophiles often select which age group to target and explore, they could be bisexual as well. However, research shows that they would more commonly prefer one gender. Overall, pedophiles can hide literally beneath any cloak to come off as a typical person in society.

Child Related Workers

While pedophiles can work anywhere, they do find ways to be around more children as often as possible. It may not be their principle profession, such as a teacher or priest, but a voluntary or weekend position as a sports coach, camp counselor, school bus driver, daycare worker, Boy Scout leader or church youth worker, any position that can provide the contact they need with children. Pediatricians and child

photographers could have that same sexual obsession as well. Some child workers, claiming to be extra concerned about the social, mental, academic and extracurricular well-being of your child, are often the culprits. So, if you have that child worker trying to get close to you and your home, you might as well start to build up walls around your child and boundaries around your house.

Happy Snappers

As earlier said, pedophiles can as well be enthusiastic collectors of photographs or videos of children, even children who are fully dressed. They will have vast image collections of children while hiding a group of child erotica and child-adult pornography. They gaze upon them behind closed doors and cherry-pick which would be a potential. So, that friend or colleague that loves taking portraits of children is probably a suspect. Look out!

The Child Molester

Some people just like picking on children, making them feel the worst of themselves every time they come in contact. A father can molest his child just because of seemingly sordid traits and behaviors. The incestuous or molester is usually an adult male such as the father, stepdad, uncle, grandfather or even boyfriend of the mother, who molests the child of the person with whom they have a termed relationship. They sexually molest children and tell them to be quiet about it, enticing them with gifts and outings or threatening them with pain infliction or murder.

However, children are silent about molesters for a number of reasons. They feel “special” because of all the attention being given to them and they may love the abusive adult. The abuser may achieve silence as well by threatening the child with splitting up or somehow damaging the family if he or she reveals the relationship or by making the victim feel they are dirty, naughty and the blame for what has occurred. A person concerned about child molestation going on in a relative’s home may be surprised to know that the mother of the child is usually aware, and complicit, for similar reasons of feeling intimidated by the molester and not wanting the “family” to split up should the situation be revealed. Single mothers are easy prey for sexual predators whose real intention is to abuse the child while continuing an intimate relationship with the mother. These are the vipers that strike deadly on the children, using the mother as a form of bait.

The Gift Giver

Gift givers spend a lot of money to please children and to get them to love them. Most times children love to be showered with gifts and would likely prefer to hang out with the person that buys them things consistently. Beware of toys and gifts from an unknown source turning up in your child’s possession. Pedophiles will often buy your child with presents and can often, in a twisted manner, portray the child as a sexual aggressor after the victim realizes he or she can bargain for toys, clothes, outings or games by withholding sexual favors. It is more of a threat if the person works in a gift store with beautiful things for children because they would know which item to use to win the child’s heart more than any parent could.

Have a clear vision of these people and warn your kids about them at any point in time.

The Always-Available Babysitter

As I mentioned earlier, some friends and relatives would fly to the moon and back to get to spend quality alone time with your kids. They already must have prepared the kid's mind by promising them a lot of nice stuff even before they approach you to seek consent. Often times a single male with no friends who is this sort of pedophile will place himself in a situation where he becomes the trusted babysitter, often for the children of several, usually single parent families. They disguise themselves as clowns and jesters that make the children happy and lively, unknown to you that there is more to them than what meets the eye. They never miss a babysitting session for anything. They turn up anytime you call them, even on their free days. This is because they virtually have nothing else to do, having no friends and jobs to take their time. They would end up spending more hours than agreed with the parents of the child, making them come off as committed rather than a threat.

The Internet Groomer

While children can be critical of a person's appearance and likely to suspect an ugly misfit, the internet has paved the way for weird people to connect. Pedophiles can still be outcast and loners, making the internet their ideal social tool. They make friends with children online and get to know them thoroughly.

Some hide behind younger profiles, while others would have not at all mind the luxury of caution. They would prefer texting your child at night, sending them lovely pictures and messages you would probably not know of or not be able to debunk. So, comfortably from their homes, they will waft their way into the minds of children and set up no-parents-or-friends meetings with them.

The Damaged

As most people would say, you never know what makes a person do what he or she does until you find out what makes him or her do it. Some people act the way they do because the same kind of actions has been done to them before. Pedophiles are often the victims of child molestation themselves. Pedophiles that were child molestation victims frequently seek out children at the age or stage of physical development at which they were molested and can more easily justify their repetition of history. Most of these people just want to give back to society and see people going through exactly what they had to deal with at a tender age. So, anyone that tells you stories of how he or she was sexually abused as a child should not have immediate access to your child. And if they already have interacted with your child, try to keep your kids safer and the person far away from them as much as possible. Never let your kids associate mindlessly with older friends with such track records.

The Good-Looking Charmer

People tend to judge others by their superficial appearances, while pedophiles can be charming, attractive

men with social graces and easy manners. Warning: never fall for them! They know how to prey upon a child's need for attention and affection and often appear helpful and trustworthy. In doing so they groom the child or children. They often target groups of young people, particularly neighborhood kids. They will invite them over to watch a movie and eat. They will offer to take the kids on trips to fun locations such as the zoo, the park or the arcade. They will spend as much time as possible making the children like them and even crave attention like an after school treat. They will touch the children in playful ways and play unique "games" eventually meant to culminate in sexual contact. This is particularly easy if there is no sign of a father figure in the children's lives. Make sure your kids tell you exactly what the neighbor has been doing with them. Particularly watch for adults who "lovetalk" children, speaking to them in a manner they would to a lover or spouse.

The truth about it all is that no matter what means the person uses to get to your child, a threat is a threat and should be treated as such. Being sentimental toward people just because of their deeds, appearances or otherwise will be very detrimental to the welfare of your children entirely. Pedophiles have been found among vicars, priests, and the Muslim faith. They have been found in the midst of council members, governors and presidents. They have equally been fished out among counselors, psychologists and therapists. So, it does not matter who is what. Treat the threats equally and find ways to keep your children away from imminent danger. They, too, should know the potential pedophiles and ways to spot them. No, you are not doing society evil before them; it is merely sex education. Besides, there is no harm in teaching your children

KAREN TILLMAN

what is called survival of the fittest. We live in the jungle nowadays.

WARNING SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE

(Source: Safe Horizon)



If you happen to have a hard time spotting the pedophiles themselves, or if you are unsure whether or not that friend is a molester, then you can resort to noticing the signs in your children or neighborhood kids. There is a vast range of symptoms you can see, ranging from emotional to physical to social and otherwise.

Behavioral Changes

These signs manifest in different forms. Your child may try to hide them from you because of what he or she has been told but a careful and caring parent will always notice. The child may suddenly develop excessive fear and anxiety toward almost everything as a result of the trauma they endure with the pedophiles. Little things will start to bother them and they will become terrified of you noticing. They may clinch up just about all the time, especially when things take them by surprise, because they always think their molester is yet again on the loose and on the verge of prying their way into their lives again. Their behavior also may take a depressive turn, making them always want to be alone, all sad and gloomy. They do this either because they do not have anyone to talk to about the problem or just do not want to have to spill their guts.

Aggression, withdrawal and avoidance of a specific individual are also signs. After school they will not feel like going home, primarily when the molester lives in the same house with them. Or, they may just want to take walks after school to clear their heads. Overly sexualized behavior or use of explicit sexual language inappropriate for the child's age may also surface.

Physical Signs

The child may have external signs that you would be able to identify quickly. Changes in sleeping patterns, including frequent nightmares, and difficulty falling asleep are some of them. Memories from their subconscious about their indoor experiences with pedophiles often trouble them at night, which can be terrifying for them. All of these signs may result in the child appearing tired or fatigued. Visible unexplained injuries such as burns, bruises or broken bones can surface just as well. The child may try to conceal them from you by using makeup and wearing long cover-up clothes. Some of them may have difficulty walking and sitting as a result of aggressive sex. Their eating habits may change, resulting in weight loss or gain. Some older children will resort to drowning themselves in liters of alcohol, as in the cases of extremity. They may even go as far as using drugs without your knowledge.

Social Changes

As we already know, a lot of experiences have post-traumatic effects which will be evident in the way we relate to people. It may as well manifest in the way we behave in public and around particular people. For children who are sexually

abused, the same is the case. Your child will start to feel uncomfortable undressing and dressing around you when they initially did not feel this way. They will begin to become very secretive about the smallest of things even when they used to discuss significant matters with you. As a result of the trauma, they will not be able to concentrate in class, causing their grades to decline and their performance in school to reduce to a minimum. They may even start to skip classes and hang out with urchins in hidden places, smoking pot and listening to hardcore, uncensored music. Their attention level generally would reduce, affecting every aspect of their lives.

As far as the signs go to tell you that something is wrong, you will never be able to pinpoint the problem until you gain your child's confidence. Getting them to talk to you without threatening them is by far the easiest way possible. Every child has to long for protection and safety from harm against odds.

HOTLINES FOR CHILD ABUSE



If you cannot handle the situation or bring the offender to justice, you can transfer the case into capable hands, who will manage it to a T. You can call the following helplines:

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Children Cyber Tip Line: 1-800-843-567

(www.cybertipline.com).

National Child Sexual Abuse Helpline: 1-866-367-5444

The Child Help National Child Abuse Hotlines

1-800-422-4553

STOP IT NOW!

1-888-773-2362

1-888-PREVENT

KAREN TILLMAN

INSPIRATIONAL POEMS



I conclude this book by leaving you with some poems that helped me deal with my predicament. They may be helpful to you or someone you know as well.

Never be bullied into silence,
Never allow yourself to be a victim,
Accept no one's definition of your life,
Define yourself.

~Harvey Feinstein

Holding onto anger is like drinking poison,
Expecting the other person to die.

~BUDDHA

Never trust anyone who wants what you have,
friend or no, envy is an overwhelming emotion

~Eubie Blake

THE END