

SIXTEEN

THE SECRET LIFE OF DAHL

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INTENTION

I know reading my story about child sexual abuse will be difficult for many people. I also understand you may be furious or even disgusted by what you read. This is not the purpose, and I don't want your forgiveness. As you read this, I ask you to listen to gain a deeper understanding of how child sexual abuse impacts lives. I hope that by sharing my story I can further awareness so that all of us, including other survivors of abuse, can become more consciously aware of the warning signs and the impact that this has on children. My wish is that social workers, teachers and counselors will be more informed of the severe emotional, psychological, and physical damage that abused children experience.

This story can be used to help educate people who work with children through the Department of Family Services (DFS), or those involved with youth homes or the foster care system, to be more alert to possible signs of sexual abuse for children who are harmed. There is so much abuse that goes on today that remains unseen. The abuse I experienced began at three years old! I would like to stop this violence, but I am only one person. There were many signs of my childhood sexual trauma that others failed to see. If you have been a victim of childhood sexual trauma or other forms of abuse, please tell someone that you can trust to get the help you need to live a healthier life.

LIFE WITH SECRETS

Secrets! What are secrets? The dictionary states: “concealed from general knowledge or view that is kept hidden, closed mouthed.” I do agree with this definition, but I’d say there’s something lacking. The definition doesn’t state the difference between good and bad secrets and how some secrets can negatively impact lives. There are many secrets in this world. There is one that impacted me and left me broken. I felt like an outcast, the loner with secrets. All sorts of people have shunned me when I failed to trust or share my secrets.

The first time I remember feeling an inappropriate touch was at the age of three. I went into my uncle’s bedroom to get one of his blankets and sat on his lap. Other adults were sitting in front of the mid-sized window. Underneath the blanket, my uncle slid his hands down my pants while the other adults did nothing.

Back then, when I was little, my Mom and I went to church. During sermon and Sunday school I was bored, so I fell asleep. My Mom said I had the “Devil” in me because I kept falling asleep. There were times that she forced me to go to church. You are probably thinking that no one can force you. Well, she did. Go to church or get the shit beat out of you. Hmm. Go to church. *(The beating was always there and will always be there. The beating will never stop. They are always there, “I will give you something to cry about if you don’t stop that crying.” SMACK! “Stop that crying you worthless piece of shit.” SMACK!)* Forgive me! Where was I, oh yes! My mom forced me to go to church. Every Sunday she did the same thing. Forced me to go to church, go to Sunday school, go home, and then beat me when I fell asleep. There were others who were similar to my mom.

I am in the fifth grade now. My foster parents were heart and soul Christians. Well, the same happened, falling asleep during sermon and Sunday school. The only thing that was different was I was forced to write a passage out of Revelations. Why did they make me do this? Because I had the “Devil” in me and I was a sinner. This includes the way my Mom taught me; for example,

she taught me it was okay for men to have sex with children. Please, don't look at me like that, that's what she taught me. Over the years, in and out of foster homes this is what I learned and how I was raised. Yes, it was all my fault, for I had the "Devil" in me. I finally was placed in a permanent foster home. Why have I been in and out of foster homes? It was because my mom never had any food and was always beating the shit out of me. (*I was in sixth grade; the weather was mild. The fresh spring air was in. I went to my mom: "Mom, my stepdad is having sex with me." "That's okay. Why don't you run along and play?"*).

One hot blistering day, my stepdad took me to get a puppy. After we brought it home my mother refused to let me have it. My stepdad intervened. "You should have seen her face when she picked that puppy." That's when mom allowed me to keep him. When my stepdad and I were alone he told me, "This was a present for you because you pleased me," and then slipped his hands down my pants. I jerked at his touch. A strange sound came from his mouth, when I got older I realized this was a moan from pleasure. My stepdad gave me other things like chocolate and money. This never ended and was the means of my purchased silence. One night when I was in the sixth grade, I woke up to the presence and shadow of my stepdad masturbating over me.

FOSTER HOMES

Where was I? Oh yes, yes, my permanent foster home. During the time that I was with them, I went to a Baptist church. Again, I fell asleep during sermon. I just found it really boring, I also went to a Catholic church as well. That was an experience in itself. You got exercise with that one. You sat, stood and then you sat again. It was like this for two to three hours. After service, I knew right then and there church was not for me.

WARNING SIGNS

There were several behaviors I exhibited as a child. I had unexplained nightmares and trouble sleeping throughout my childhood. I left several clues that provoked sexual discussions with written, drawn, and inappropriate play-acting of sexual and some scary things. I refused to tell the secrets I shared with other adults. I began bed wetting in the first grade. I even wet the bed often as an older child when I stayed at my Grandfather's house. I continued to wet myself even when placed in group homes and don't know when it stopped. I have also used self-injury, like cutting, as a cry for help. I was obsessed with my personal hygiene and constantly showered or bathed myself. I was sexually promiscuous and can recall that I performed sex with other students in the fifth grade, while other classmates watched as an audience. This happened outside in school yards and in school bathrooms.

Home was never a safe place for me. I first started running away from home in the sixth grade. I was returned home many times yet no one ever asked me why. I want to let you know that abuse can happen anywhere. I even was sexually abused by another girl while I was in the youth home. During gym in my high school years I felt ashamed of my body and would cover myself with clothing from the neck down even on the hottest of days.

I have suffered from great anxiety and depression all of my life. I also suffered from fear of intimacy and compulsive eating and dieting to feel better within my own skin. I also began using amphetamines in the tenth grade. As an adult, I became addicted to sex and had many, many partners. It seemed I could never get enough.

Graduation finally came. The year was 1995. Finally, out of high school. I spent the next five years at a spiritual loss. For five years I was searching for a religion. By the time the new millennium came, I was back to living with my Mom. Yes, the same Mom that taught me it was okay for men to have sex with children. At this time, I already had two children. My first, a son,

was born 1997. He was born with autism. Back then they didn't have much like they do today; I gave him up because I couldn't get help. My other one, my girl, was just a baby. She was born in 1999. The father and I arranged a visit, and then finally the father had her most of the time. I also had one more baby girl.

Later, in 2006, I fell in love and got married. My mother got angry and disowned me when she lost control. He, too, was sexually abused as a child, and we had a lot in common. I loved and trusted him completely. Things seemed to be going pretty good. We had a decent apartment. I had both of my girls. Then, I began to notice that he seemed more closed off and distant like he was keeping secrets. That's when I confronted him.

Both his facial expressions and body language changed. He cowered and slouched, hiding his guilt and shame. He told me that he had sex with my twelve-year old daughter. I said nothing. I didn't come forward, seek help, or report it, for I believed since the age of three that this was acceptable and a "normal" thing that fathers do. Shortly after that, my husband got my daughter pregnant, and in the spring, at the age of thirteen, she gave birth to a baby girl.

When November came, I got arrested and felt very confused, not fully understanding my actions were criminal. I went before the Judge and got charged with conspiracy of sexual abuse on a minor child. I did not know this was wrong; my Mom, that bitch, taught me. I even felt like God had forsaken me. My brothers and sisters have disowned me. Currently I am serving two consecutive twenty-five-year sentences at the Wyoming Women's Center in Lusk, Wyoming. With counseling and education, I fully understand that my actions were horrifically wrong. My sentence was not only just, but the well-deserved punishment and karma for the harm that I caused my own children.

REALITY

Not one adult or authority figure saw or intervened on my behalf. They turned a blind eye. Maybe they didn't want to believe

it was happening. Fact One: I sought help and ran away from home. Fact Two: the cops placed me right back in danger, even though I was getting the shit beat out of me. Fact Three: my mom taught me it was okay to stay with men that have sex with children. Fact Four: social services placed me and my husband in homes where we were sexually abused.

My father and grandfather were two good, caring role models throughout my life. In hindsight, they have been two members of my family that truly loved me. I could trust and count on them. One was my Grandfather Bear and the other was my father. Looking back, I realize I should have told them, someone, *anyone* what was happening to me. This I believe was my missed opportunity. They would have pulled me out! I know that if they would have known about my victimization, they would have helped me and gotten me out of there.

CHANGE IN THINKING

I often miss and think of my children. My two girls have been living in foster care, and this has not been an easy decision. I love them. I have weighed out the pros and the cons and I feel they are in a safer and healthier environment now. I know that I mistreated and abused them and damaged their lives. I have placed them up for adoption. I hope that with help they may heal and have healthier lives. The type of lives they deserve. Some day they might have questions. When that time comes, I will be honest and speak the truth. Whatever questions they ask me will be answered.

Now as I sit in the Wyoming Women's Center (WWC), I fully understand that both my actions and my husband's actions were erroneous and immoral. Back when I first got arrested, I didn't think anything I did was wrong. As I went back and forth with the Judge I became more and more confused. As I slowly came to grips with what I had done, I signed over my rights and gave up my two wonderful girls in order to stop this cycle of sexual violence. It was hard for me, but I realize that they will have

more opportunities to get the mental and emotional help they need to live safer and more secure lives.

When the Judge laid down his sentence, that's when it hit me and hit me hard. *Yes! I have harmed my children.* What I did to my daughter is inexcusable. I know that she will need long-term counseling to help her get through this pain I put her through. Before I came here, I tried to kill myself. Inmates stopped me and slammed me up against the jail's walls. Then guards handcuffed me and I went to "seg," segregation. Probably half of you reading this are wondering why the inmate interfered. I agree. I ask that same question. I am not saying I am going to kill myself now. The realization that I hurt my children opened my eyes. Even though I feel I am the only one this has happened to, I know different. I know this could happen to anyone. I was a product of abuse and I became a perpetrator of the abuse I was exposed to. It is hard that people judge me before knowing all the facts.

I am here within these walls to undo and unlearn the thinking processes my mom and stepdad taught me. I currently suffer with PTSD and major depression and take medications. I still feel unable to trust anybody. I look at men and think they are going to do something to me, even though here in prison I am safe. I never feel safe. I remember lessons about consequences I learned from my father and grandfather. I have many issues to deal with, and I know I must do this alone, for I am truly the only one that can fix them.

Again, I would like to thank you for reading my story. I know intimately how the subject of childhood sexual abuse can be hard and difficult to digest. I hope this has deepened your understanding of the impact that child sexual victimization has on children and adult lives. I hope it encourages those that have been through this experience to come forward. I hope it helps other adults and those working with children to be more aware of potential warning signs. For there is so much that goes on that remains unseen, a secret.

THE ROLLER COASTER

I am tired of this place.
I am so disgraced.
Disowned, I deserved this...
There is no place to hide.
I still have to face the demons inside.
My failure, as I lick my pride.
The demons have won...
One by one.
I never get this torment inside.
It slowly eats at my humanity.
Filled with emotion.
Wanting to be numb...
It would be nice not to feel.
But, that... would be unreal.
I can't, I won't...
I need to feel,
Face my demons alone.
One by one
To end the torment that lies within.
I know I can't just give in.
What else am I supposed to do burst?
Emotions keep flowing.
Painful, yet growing...
I know I am in this till the end.
Alone...
I stand up straight and give blows on my own
This torment subsides...
In my undecided. Life.
No turning back.
Still learning from this mishap.