



WELCOME TO THE JUNE 2012 EDITION OF THE LAUREL HOUSE NEWSLETTER

The Laurel House Newsletter is produced and circulated amongst clients, service providers and the community to raise awareness of the services available at Laurel House. It is also a venue to give advanced notice of upcoming groups and projects for survivors. There will also be a number of articles about Sexual Assault, stories from survivors, and links to other services for your information.

You can also view this newsletter on our website:
www.laurelhouse.org.au

During 2012 we plan to provide readers with information on belief and the importance of believing victims/survivors of sexual assault

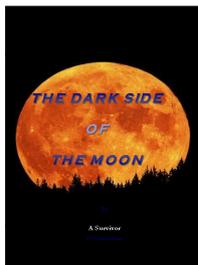
About Laurel House

Laurel House offers a wide range of services to all members of the community, including victims of recent rape and sexual assault (both adults, children and their families and support people) adult survivors of child sexual abuse (historical sexual abuse) community education to any group, school, or organisation, and professional training to service providers in other agencies. We also offer debriefing and supervision to professionals working with victims/survivors of sexual assault.

Our Organisation offers outreach services to women, men and children within the 63 telephone region of Tasmania. These areas currently include Deloraine, Westbury, Longford, Campbell Town, St Marys, St Helens, Bicheno, Beaconsfield, Exeter, and Georgetown, with services to Scottsdale available as the need arises.

Telephone support is available to other rural areas.

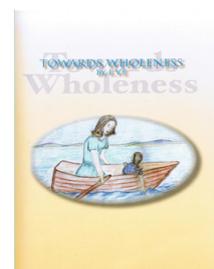
Books



Laurel House has 2 books available for purchase

Dark Side of the Moon, which documents a survivor's journey through life so far; and *Towards Wholeness* a condensed account of the author's own recovery process.

Please contact the Laurel House office on 6334 2740 or email admin@laurelhouse.org.au for further information or to order your copy.



Women's Self Care

Meeting day to be
confirmed

Group will run for eight (8) weeks

This group is for women who attend Laurel House and are looking for ways to improve their overall well being. Topics for discussion will be stress-management, including sleep, diet, exercise, relaxation, problem solving, life balance and self esteem.



If you are interested please
let us know by either tell-
ing your counsellor or by
calling us on 63342740

Announcements...

On Call Workers

Laurel House is currently on the lookout for workers to join our On Call Team. Laurel House On Call workers are on duty from 5 p.m.—8.30 a.m. Monday-Friday, and offer a 24-hour service over weekends and public holidays.

If you would be interested in joining the Team, or if you have any questions, please contact Jacinta on 6334 2740 or admin@laurelhouse.org.au

Laurel House Commitment

Laurel House workers are committed to upholding the principles of social justice.

We do not support racism, discrimination, bullying, violence or prejudice in any form.

We encourage all workers, organisations and individuals to speak up and challenge policies and practices that violate others' human rights, both here in Australia and overseas.

Community Education

Laurel House workers are currently involved in developing community education programmes for schools in Deloraine, Lilydale, St Marys, Smithton, Queenstown, Roseberry, and Burnie.

If you are interested in finding out more about the Community Education programmes offered by Laurel House, or if you would like a programme to be tailored to suit your organisation, please email counsellors@laurelhouse.org.au

Breaking Silence

Taken from *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (Ellen Bass & Laura Davis, Random House UK, 1988)

An essential part of healing from child sexual abuse is telling the truth about your life. The sexual molestation of children, and the shame that results, thrive in an atmosphere of silence. Breaking that silence is a powerful healing tool. Yet it is something many survivors find difficult.

I feel very lonely and isolated. I've always had so much to say, and I've never said it. What's hindered me the most is being so skilled at being silent. Incest has had so much to do with being silenced and silencing myself.

How you were silenced

The first time you tried to talk about your abuse, you may still have been a child. Under ideal circumstances, you would have been believed, protected and assured that the abuse wasn't your fault. You would have been given age-appropriate counselling and placed in a support group with other children. If the abuser was a family member, he would have been sent away, not you.

Unfortunately, this was probably not the response you got. More likely, you were threatened, blamed, or called a liar. You were accused of 'asking for it' or were called a 'a little whore.' You may have been warned not to tell during the abuse itself: "It would kill your mother if she knew," or "I'll kill you if you tell."

Sometimes telling led to further abuse. One child confided in her best friend. That girl told her father, who asked for details. He then took both girls into the garage and did to them all the things he'd just heard about.

Telling frequently ignites the wrath of the abuser. Eleven-year-old Carey was abused by both her mother and her step-father.

When I was eleven, I went horse-back riding with my best girlfriend. I told my girlfriend what I was doing with my stepfather. She told her mother who called my mother. When I got home, my mother came tearing out of the house, crazy angry. She grabbed me and pulled me off my horse. Kicking me and hitting me, she dragged me into the house, up the steps, across the porch, into my bedroom. She threw me on the bed, screaming at me about telling stories.

I was sobbing and saying, "They're not stories, they're true, and you know they're true." And she started to choke me. My stepfather was standing right behind her, watching, with no expression on his face.

I couldn't breathe. I believed she would have killed me. It was the third time she'd tried. Finally he pulled her off, saying, "You know nobody's going to believe her. Nobody believes anything she says."

If your case was taken to court, you may have been subjected to brutal testimony procedures, grilled by insensitive defense attorneys, or repeatedly forced to face your abuser.

If your mother divorced your father because he was abusing you, you may have felt guilty for breaking up the marriage, for separating your family, or for ruining a "happy home."

Children not slapped with an actively cruel response are often met with devastating silence or told never to speak of it again. Families often go on as if nothing happened, never mentioning it. In that case, children get the message that their experience is too horrible for words. And, by implication, that they are too horrible.

In this way, children learn there is no one they can trust, that sharing leads not to help but to harm or neglect, that it's not safe to tell the truth. In other words, they learn shame, secrecy, and silence.

How Children Tell

children “tell” that they’ve been abused. They tell in vague terms: “I don’t like Mrs Johnson.” “I don’t want to go to Boy Scouts anymore.” For a child, “Don’t make me go Poppa’s house anymore” is a very clear message.

If children don’t tell with words, they often tell through behavior. They wet their beds. They steal from a parent’s wallet. They are terrified to go to sleep, and wake up screaming from nightmares. They regress to more babyish behavior. They don’t want to be left alone. They develop asthma. They stop eating. They have trouble in school. They cry hysterically every time a particular babysitter comes over. They demonstrate a precocious interest in sex. They act seductively to get things they want.

Sometimes older children or teenagers act out by disobeying or getting into trouble with authorities. They become depressed, take drugs, or engage in self-destructive behavior. They are trying to get someone to pay attention, but their behavior is usually misinterpreted. They are labeled “bad” or “stupid.” These messages make them feel even more hopeless. “Perhaps they’re right,” the kid thinks. “I am no good. No wonder he does that to me.”

Perceptive parents notice changes and respond. They listen, no matter how their children express themselves. But until recently most abused children had no one who would listen. No one wanted to know. Stuck in an abusive situation, often with an unrealistic sense of responsibility, they carried this secret burden alone.

If you believe you didn't tell, look again. In your own way, you reached out for help—and were denied.

Telling: It talks a leap of Faith

It’s not only children who have been met with insulting or insensitive responses when they tried to talk about their abuse. Adult survivors have also been blamed, ridiculed, or shunned. Yet in spite of these negative experiences from the past, it is necessary to take a leap of faith—and tell.

Telling is transformative. When you let someone know what you have lived through and that person hears you with respect and genuine caring you begin a process of change essential to healing. Catherine was in a therapy group when she first told about her abuse:

I had to get and talk about what my parents had done to me, and why it was hard for me to grow up in my family. I remember being in the group and crying, and saying, “I can’t tell this to you. My parents are going to get me if I say this to you!” It was horrible. People encouraged me to tell my story, and I finally did.

When it was over I went home and laid in my bed, and literally waited to die. I had never told anybody before. I knew my parents would find out that I had told on them, and would get me. And that’s when I decided I was going to become a person who could talk, instead of being a person who had to keep secrets.

In workshops, when a woman tells her story the effects are often dramatic. She no longer feels so different or alone. She knows she is understood because she has been listening to other survivors’ stories and she understands them. She learns that she is important, worthwhile, and lovable because she feels the compassion of the other women as they listen and respond to her. She feels authentic because she allows herself to feel her real feelings. She experiences release because there is relief in the telling.

When I talked about the incest with my counselor, it stayed almost as big a secret as when I hadn’t told anyone. Going to group and speaking to all those people was important. It was a real coming out.

After telling in a group, you may feel as though being a survivor, with all its difficulties, is not all bad. As one woman said, “We’re a beautiful, courageous bunch of women—and I’m proud to be one.”

Why telling is transformative

You move through the shame and secrecy that keeps you isolated.

You move through denial and acknowledge the truth of your abuse.

Your make it possible to get understanding and help.

Your get more in touch with your feelings.

You get a chance to see your experience (and yourself) through the compassionate eyes of a supporter.

You make space in relationships for the kind of intimacy that comes from honesty.

You establish yourself as a person in the present who is dealing with the abuse in her past.

You join a courageous community of women who are no longer willing to suffer in silence.

You help end child sexual abuse by breaking the silence in which it thrives.

You become a model for other survivors

You (eventually) feel proud and strong.

Breaking the silence: Abused by Women

Although the vast majority of sexual abuse is committed by heterosexual men, a small percentage of abusers are women. Both girls and boys have been abused by their mothers, aunts, grandmother, or other women.

Since much of the incest literature has focused on father-daughter incest, or solely on abuse with a male perpetrator, those survivors who were abused by women have felt even more isolated than those abused by men.

At an incest art gathering in Los Angeles in 1980, one woman played a videotape in which she talked about the incest she'd experienced with her mother. The response she got was one of shock and disbelief.

A woman who'd written a major book about incest stood up in the audience and said, "There is no incest between mothers and daughter." so I walked away thinking, "I must be crazy."

The unwillingness to acknowledge women as offenders has slowly started to break down. Support groups for survivors abused by women are beginning, but many women still find themselves discounted:

I find that when I tell my story, a lot of people are uncomfortable. People have all these squirmy reactions. It's almost as if they don't quite believe it. I can't just tell my story- I have to tell my story and then explain it.

People like to think in categories. So when you talk about women as sexual abusers, it blows a lot of myths: Women aren't sexual. Women are gentle. Women are passive. How could a woman do that to a child?

But people need to hear it. They need to hear, "I'm an incest survivor, and it was my mother."

Women do abuse, and if it's not put out there, the healing can't happen.

Most of the issues explored in this book apply to all survivors, but there are some unique problems faced by survivors of abuse by women. Although women sometimes abuse in overtly sexual or violent ways, their abuse is typically more subtle and less forceful. Women's abuse is often masked in cuddling and daily care-taking. The violation is often fuzzier, less clear-cut than a penis in a vagina. But it is no less devastating.

Since children frequently bond most closely with their mothers, abuse by mothers, in particular, can leave a child with a severe lack of boundaries between herself and her offender.

For a while I didn't know where my mother left off and I began. I thought she had a psychic hold on me. I was convinced she knew every thought I had. It was like she was in my body, and she was evil. I felt I was possessed, that I was going to be taken over. I've had a real fear that if I look at all that stuff that I don't like about myself, it would be my mother inside of me. And I've had to do a lot of growing over the last few years to know that she's not inside me anymore.

Other women have had a hard time maturing, watching their bodies grow similar to their mother's.

For a long, long time, I didn't call myself a woman. When I left home at eighteen, I continued to call myself a girl because I couldn't stomach the associations with "woman," which meant being sexual. My mother was a woman, but I was a girl. If being a woman meant being like her, that's not what I wanted. It took a long time for me to get rid of that self-hate.

It is essential not to discount the pain and betrayal experienced by survivors of abuse by women. Every survivor deserves to heal.

The Levels of Telling

There are many levels of telling, ranging from the first time you dare to broach this subject to when you have told so many times and in so many ways that you can talk about it naturally, as just another part of your life. Each time you tell is a different experience. Telling your therapist or your support group, telling your partner or a new lover, telling a friend, telling publicly, telling in writing, will all feel different.

You may tell with detachment, with sadness, with anger, or occasionally even with humor. Participants in a recent summer I Never Told Anyone group nicknamed the workshop "Incest Camp," and one woman sent everyone T-shirts with "I.C. Survivor" printed across the front.

Jude Brister, a co-editor of I Never Told Anyone, said that each time she talked about her abuse, it put more distance between herself and the pain. The more she talked about it, the less she identified herself as a victim. She saw herself instead as a strong, capable adult.

Ella, another survivor who has told her experiences many times, described her process in detail:

For me there were at least three different levels of telling. The first was telling the story and not feeling anything. Telling it as a third-party story. Saying "I" but not really meaning it happened to me. At that point I still didn't really believe it happened. And part of that telling was that I was really angry. It was a way to get back at them, Like "I'm going to tell on you." It's kind of like "I couldn't get anybody mad at you then, but watch this!"

Then there was a really painful, scared level of telling. The tone of my voice changed and I looked like I was seven years old. My language was more simple. And it hurt. That's the place I discovered my feelings. And usually people got sad when they heard it that way. They felt sorry for me. The people I told that way included my therapist, my close friend, people in caretaker positions, paid or unpaid. It included the people in my support group. I told not like a victim, but like a little kid that hurt.

The last way I've told has to do with stepping back and seeing the bigger picture. I looked at family dynamics and got the rest of the story. I saw what happened and why it happened. I put the abuse through a sieve and was able to see parts of it I couldn't see when I was only hurt or angry.

So I went from anger to pain to a fixing. In Hebrew there's a word, *tikun*, that means a fixing, a healing. That way of telling was a *tikun*.

Choosing someone to tell

If you are in counselling or a support group where you feel safe, that's an excellent place to begin to talk about your abuse. Telling for the first time can feel scary, and it helps to be in a context where you know someone will listen compassionately.

Telling your partner, lover, or close friends is also important. You need to let the people around you know why you are sometimes sad, angry, upset, busy, needing to be alone. Your friends need to understand why you may not trust them readily. Your lover needs to know why you may have difficulty with sex, why you withdraw or cling. There is a lot of work involved in building healthy relationships, and you need the people in your life as allies. Although it is not necessary—or even

appropriate—to tell every single person you meet, it is important that you share with the people you want to be close to.

I don't run around telling every soul I meet that I'm an incest victim, because I don't want that to be my definition, but I went through a period of time when it was just about like that. That was the first thing I would tell people, almost anybody. "Did you know I was an incest victim?" "Oh really, thank you for sharing that." It's like any movement, whether it's Black power or gay rights, you need time to try that identity on and claim it. I needed to do that, but that need has faded over time. Now I just do what I feel like doing. If I feel like telling someone, I do. If I don't, I don't.

For some women, telling goes even further. They see it as a political choice, a necessity. Dorianne Laux, who runs workshops in sexual abuse for teenagers and has read her poetry about incest extensively, explains:

So many women still feel they have to hide the fact they were molested. I can just see it in their bodies, that they're real frightened that somebody might find out. Well, I don't like that. I don't have to be frightened that somebody's going to find out.

I always use my first and last name when I talk about incest. It's a political statement for me. I don't have anything to be ashamed of. I don't have to be anonymous. Even though it could affect my life in some way, it shouldn't. It should affect his *life*.

And the whole idea of the secret is perpetuated when I keep my name out of it. Incest doesn't need to be hidden. It needs the exact opposite. People need to come out and say, "My name is so-and-so, this happened to me, and I'm angry about it."

Also, I'm a fairly well-adjusted person, and I make a good role model for the young people I work with. So speaking out and saying who I am is real important to me.

How to tell

Talking about your abuse with a skilled counsellor or supportive group of survivors needs no planning. They should be able to hear you however you get the words out. But if you are telling friends or family for the first time, it's best to make the circumstances as favourable as possible. (This applies only to telling family members you expect to be supportive.) You can maximise your support by choosing wisely. When you're considering talking to someone, ask yourself the following questions:

Does this person care for and respect me?

Does this person have my well-being in mind?

Is this someone I've been able to discuss feelings with before?

Do I trust this person?

Do I feel safe with this person?

If you can answer yes to all of these questions, you're choosing someone who's likely to be supportive.

Tell your friend (lover, partner, cousin) that there's something personal and vulnerable that you want to share and ask if this is a good time to talk. Suggest that if it isn't you could make it another time. By asking, you ensure that your friend doesn't need to leave for work in five minutes. You also give that person a chance to either postpone the talk or prepare to listen.

If there are certain responses that you want or don't want, say so. You may want your friend to listen but not to give a lot of advice. You may want to be asked questions, or you may want to be listened to silently. You may want to be held or you may not want to be touched at all. Often people want to support you but don't know how (or how to ask). A good friend will welcome your guidance.

And if you want what you say to be kept confidential, say so. Although it is important to break silence, do so at your own pace, with people you choose.

Weeding

Listening to the truth of someone's life is a privilege and an honor. When you tell someone your history, they should receive it as such. But because this is not always the case, you need to be prepared for possible negative responses.

Some people may be threatened. Some will go blank or be shocked. These people may be reminded of their own abuse. If they have not recovered their memories, all their defenses may ring in alarm, trying to protect them from their own remembering. Some people will be horrified. Some may not even believe you initially. Others may be incredibly rude. One woman waited until after she had had three children to finally tell her husband about the incest. His response: "You mean I wasn't the first one?"

One survivor was reluctant to tell: "I have been afraid of people's reactions. People like victims. There's an animal part in people, and they get excited, and they'll just jump on you." Other people have been titillated by the stories of survivors and have asked for "details." In a society where the sexual abuse of children has been eroticized, this is not surprising.

Although you will meet up with some of these hostile, insensitive, or insulting responses, it is still important to tell. There is a weeding out that goes on in relationships when you start to share who you really are, how you genuinely feel. You may find that some relationships cannot stand this challenge and you will grieve for them, along with your other losses. Or you may choose to continue the relationship on a more superficial level rather than abandoning it altogether.

Although it is likely that you will get some unsatisfying responses, it is also likely that you will get some supportive, sympathetic ones, as Laura described:

When I first remembered my abuse, I was overwhelmed. I stopped calling my friends and when they called me, I was distant and preoccupied. Karen, my closet friend, was hurt and angry. She was about to write me off totally. Finally, I told her about the abuse. Once she knew what was going on, she was wonderful. She became my most devoted supporter.

It is important that you have some relationships in which you can be your whole self—with your history, with your pain and anger—and the only way to create those is to share honestly about yourself. When you are met in that honesty, then you feel real intimacy.

Triple Chocolate Brownies

Ingredients:

Serves 16

200g butter
200g dark chocolate
1 cup brown sugar
3 eggs, lightly beaten
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3/4 cup plain flour
2 tablespoons cocoa powder
230g Cadbury white chocolate baking chips



Photography by Steve Brown

Preparation method:

Prep time: 15 minutes Cook: 18 minutes

1. Preheat oven to 180 degrees C. Line a 5cm deep, (18cm) square cake pan with non-stick baking paper
2. Heat butter, chocolate and sugar in saucepan over low heat, stirring constantly until melted and smooth. Transfer to heatproof and set aside to cool slightly.
3. Add eggs and vanilla to chocolate mixture. Mix well. Sift flour and cocoa over chocolate mixture. Stir to combine. Gently fold through chocolate baking chips.
4. Pour brownie mixture into pan. Bake for 18 minutes or until just set.

Useful Websites and Contact Numbers

Children

Bravehearts Inc. www.bravehearts.org.au

Australian Childhood Foundation www.childhood.org.au

Kids Help Line www.kidshelpline.com.au

Attempted Suicide and/or Self harm

Safe in Oz Pty Ltd. www.safeinoz.com.au

Time Out Programme www.timeout.org.au Mobile: 0407 102 140

Beyond Blue www.ybblue.com.au

Crisis Counselling

Laurel House www.laurelhouse.org.au Telephone 6334 2740 or after hours 0409 800 394

Sexual Assault Support Service Hobart Telephone 6231 1811

North West Centre Against Sexual Assault Telephone 6431 9711

Lifeline www.lifeline.org.au Telephone 131 114

Samaritans Tas Launceston Telephone 6331 3355 Rest of Tasmania 1300 364 566

24-hour Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Support—1800 Respect (1800 737 732)

Would you like to contribute to the Laurel House newsletter?

Laurel House is looking for people to contribute stories, poems and artwork to the newsletter to share with survivors of sexual assault, family members and service providers. Items can be published anonymously if requested. If you would like to contribute something to the newsletter please send to:

counsellors@laurelhouse.org.au or PO Box 1062 Launceston, 7250. All items will be carefully considered and published in upcoming newsletters.

We would appreciate any feedback or suggestions that you may have as we continue to develop our newsletter. Please call us on 6334 2740 or email

counsellors@laurelhouse.org.au

Laurel House

PO Box 1062, Launceston 7250

Phone weekdays 8:30am – 5pm

(03) 6334 2740

After Hours Crisis Line

0409 800 394

Fax: (03) 6334 4234

Email: counsellors@laurelhouse.org.au

Website: www.laurelhouse.org.au