A Community Experiential Commentary on Surviving Childhood Violence

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This is dedicated to those of us who have travelled the dark road of child sexual assault and live to tell about it. You are my brothers and sisters.
To my children — Jason, Michelle, and Angela: Thank you for “Being You.”
To my grandchildren — Jaden, Trenton, D’Andre, Julia, Alyssa, Zoya, and Arianna: My prayer is you never experience “my story.”
When I was first approached to write an article for publishing, I had no idea what to say or what approach to take. Initially, I began writing in a very professional manner using terminology (words) that only university-educated people could understand. I decided, however, that my story needs to be understood by the multitudes who have experienced childhood violence and to those who are working in various capacities towards the well being of children. In my experience, if the message cannot be understood then it falls on deaf ears. My mother could not understand my few attempts to tell her what was happening to me, and so she could not hear my need. In this writing, I am using the style of my ancestors … story telling. I will talk about what happened to me, because it still happens to so many. I will describe the long term consequences, the triggers that still affect me emotionally, and the Spiritual lessons for me.

My name is Taz and I have lived through many assaults throughout my lifetime. I struggle to feel good about myself, proud of who I am. I also struggle with being close to people and trusting their intentions. I know that this all relates to being assaulted as a child. I will take you on a journey that will teach you about sexual abuse and the impact it has had on me physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. The only truth that I know is my own and this story is not intended to hurt or harm anyone. It is just my truth as I see it. If this story has an effect on you, take time with a professional counsellor or Elder to explore the feelings.

**Physical Reflection**

I was born in a northern community called High Prairie, Alberta. I am the youngest of nineteen children. According to my parents, I was a very wanted child. When I was born, my mother died during childbirth and was revived. She told me that I was born twice. She quite often said that she came back because her children needed her and I needed to be here as well. As a toddler, I recall that my parents enjoyed going out on weekends after working hard all week. It was during one of these times, that I experienced my first sexual assault. When I was only two years old, my brothers placed me underneath a dog that they had sexually aroused. I recall feeling very scared and wanting to get away. The dog was a huge collie and stronger than I was. I couldn’t escape
it. I can hear the dog breathing as it moved on my back. I can recall crying out to my brothers for help and getting no response.

**Mental Consequences**

For the longest time I feared dogs and I couldn’t understand why. I had lost the memory of my brothers’ violence. When a dog came near me in someone’s home, I wanted to kick it across the room. To this day, I can’t stand the sound of a dog breathing heavily near me. I have had difficulty in staying in one place very long and I believe it is because home was not a safe place for me. Danger lurked when adults were not around. At two years old, I acted out my fear by screaming at times and clinging to my parents when they were around. I wanted the episodes with the dog to stop and they didn’t. This taught me that the only way to get attention was to scream loudly and kick up a storm.

**Emotional Triggers**

Dogs, heavy breathing, touches on my back.

**Spiritual Lesson**

_The Spirit remembers everything and the truth always reveals itself because truth and Spirituality are interconnected._

**Physical Reflection**

My family moved from High Prairie to Faust, Alberta, and then to Edmonton, Alberta … the big city. I was eight years old. I was sleeping on the floor between two beds when my older cousin assaulted me. He had been drinking and returned home in the middle of the night. It was pitch dark and I can remember feeling someone touching me all over. I tried to see what or who it was but could see only a dark blob over me. I could feel my body being touched and my pants being pulled down. I wrestled with my pants being removed, but the dark thing just pushed me down. It started licking me on my face, my arms, my belly, and then it licked me between my legs. I froze into a stiff position and pretended to fall asleep, hoping it would stop. I held my breath for as long as I could. When I finally gulped in a huge breath, the dark thing stopped licking me. I jumped up and ran to my parents’ bed. When I crawled in, my mother woke up. I tried to tell her but did not have the words
to explain what happened. She hugged me and told me not to be scared. It wasn’t a monster, but Johnny on the floor where I was sleeping. Then she told me to go back to bed. I got off the bed and crawled into my blankets and covered up my whole body. I could hear my cousin breathing near me. In the morning, my cousin talked to me. He said he did what he did because he loved me and I was his special girl.

**Mental Consequence**

I never believed anyone when they said they loved me. In fact, I hated hearing those words. I feared the dark for many years and I would avoid my cousin at family gatherings. I couldn’t stand the smell of alcohol. I hated hearing my cousin singing and getting praises from the family. I felt angry whenever he was around. I avoided being touched. I lashed out verbally when I felt scared. For many years, I would freeze still as soon someone started any type of sexual advances. At the age of eight, I stopped feeling and I stopped crying.

**Emotional Triggers**

Smell of alcohol on someone’s breath, dark places, words of affection, sexual advances.

**Spiritual Lesson**

*Fear stops people from feeling and experiencing the full essence of the Gift of Life.*

**Physical Reflection**

I cannot completely recall every assault that I experienced from the ages of 13 to 15. I get what I call “shadow memories,” glimpses of men. A friend of my brother, ten years older than me, would rape me whenever he had the opportunity. Usually this took place at my brother’s house. My brother and my nephew raped me in the car when I caught a ride with them to visit my dad, who had moved back to Faust. While they raped me, I focused on the roof of the car. My nephew told me to move my body because he didn’t like me just lying there. After they finished, I tried to jump out of the moving car. Another nephew watched what happened, but when he was invited to take a turn, he refused. There was a man who held a knife to my throat while he raped me in the back seat of a car near a farm. He had offered me a ride home from a mu-
tual friend’s house. There was a man who raped me in a hotel room after my niece had convinced me to join them there. There was a man who offered me a ride home from downtown and fondled my breasts. My sisters’ boyfriends kissed me and told me they loved me. My mother had a boyfriend who tried to touch me when mom left to go shopping. I got a butcher knife and dared him to take one step closer. I did not tell anyone in my family about these assaults. Each assailant said he loved me, that I was so pretty, so beautiful, so special. These were not words that I heard from anyone in my family. They were the words of my assailants.

**Mental consequence**

My self talk was full of hate. I hated myself. I hated being a girl. I hated having breasts. I stayed away from home as much as possible. I walked aggressively and I would attack people who verbally threatened me. I carried a knife. I spent a lot of time alone. I became part of a gang that was just starting up. I was drawn to tough guys and motorcycles. I rebelled against my mother, skipped school and refused to abide by any household rules. I looked for answers in churches, spent time with teen groups, slept in apartment laundry rooms, and distrusted everyone. I felt nothing. I believed that being raped and used sexually by men was part of life. I did not feel safe anywhere.

**Emotional Triggers**

Hotel rooms, friendly men, my brother, angry voices, back seats, sex, violence, certain colognes, certain styles of clothing, textures and colours, compliments, kindness, gentleness, country music.

**Spiritual Lesson**

*There are always similar medicines on Mother Earth, one is a fooler and the other is the healer. It is important to know which is which.*

**In Summary**

My experiences as a child left me unable to say, “no.” They affected my choices of boyfriends, lovers, husbands, and friends. At the age of fifteen, I married my first husband and we had three children. In this marriage, I experienced physical abuse and long-term trauma. We were divorced after seven years. My ex-husband moved in with my mother and I had no family support. I
attempted suicide three times during the break up. I remarried at the age of 26 and divorced at the age of 39. In this marriage, I suffered mental and emotional abuse. This ex-husband continues to live with a mental illness called obsessive-compulsive disorder. At the time of our marriage, I wasn’t aware of his condition. During this marriage I didn’t shower alone for a period of six years (not my choice) and I finally had an emotional breakdown. I didn’t recognize that I was crying constantly but thought I had developed a leak in my eyes. The extent of my denial was very deep. I had buried the intense feelings of hurt over the many assaults and abuses. Diagnosed with clinical depression, I had no choice but to start therapy. It was very hard and emotional. At times I felt like running and hiding. Instead I kept going back for more understanding. After dealing with loss, I decided to embrace the teachings of my Kookum (who had shared a room with me for years) and started the process of reclaiming my Spirit. I attended talking circles, Pipe ceremonies, Sweatlodge ceremonies, and Sundance ceremonies. During a Healing Round at Sundance, I started to recall some of the sexual assaults. My people have been the ones who helped me to reclaim my Spirit and embrace who I am in totality.

I am proud to say that I am a Cree/Sioux/Scottish woman who has lived through some horrific experiences and can now say, “Nanaskamun, oti ka moteyan.” I give Thanks for walking here. And I have chosen to share these experiences in the hope that it will help someone out there to realize these things.

1. Sexual abuse can occur anywhere, any time and predators of children will seek opportunities to assault a child. Predators will select children who are not being listened to, or acknowledged.

2. Being part of such a large family increased my vulnerability to assault. My parents unknowingly increased the risk of my being assaulted, raped, and abused by not teaching me proper terminology, healthy sexuality, and safety strategies.

3. My parents unknowingly invited perpetrators into the home. They did not ask questions about the behaviours of guests and family, nor did they explain inappropriate touching or establish boundaries.

4. Even the worst experiences can be healed. Today, I am enjoying the vast emotions that I feel. My life no longer includes sexual abuse and I am
very capable of creating a safe place for myself. I encourage anyone who hasn’t talked about their experiences of sexual abuse to open up and share their story. Share your story with people who understand the Sacredness of your Journey Inward. The first time is the absolutely hardest time and it does get easier with each sharing.

In closing, I believe that as a people it is important to share our stories and break the silence. It is a shame that lives in our Spirits, our hearts, and our lives unless brought out in the open. Again this is not meant to hurt anyone but an attempt to increase awareness of the problem so that we can lower the risk of violence to children. It starts with Self disclosure, then family wellness, community intervention, and global awareness. Thank you for your time and I pray this message meets you in a good way.

I would like to add that Silence Condone and it is imperative that people understand how sexual assault affects their lives, homes, and communities. **Do something about it! Talk about It! Write about It! Sing about it! Pray about It!**

HIY! HIY!
Honoring my Ancestors
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