

Collateral damage – learning to live without regret: Part III

written by admin | May 31, 2019



See also: [Part I](#) [Part II](#)

Part III: And it all came tumbling down

By Daisy . . . It was early in the morning on that summer day in 2003 when we heard a knock on our apartment door. As young, success-minded individuals, we were living above our affordability range in an apartment within a beautiful brick home in a trendy area of our city. The people at the door announced themselves as the police. They pounded on the door of my perfectly crafted life, each knock sending tremors that would eventually topple my inner building to its foundation.

The presence of strangers now searching through all of our drawers and closets and cabinets caused the initial cracks in the facade of my once well-constructed being. They rushed in and took everything we had: every computer, every CD, every floppy disk. Alan, being an unabashed connoisseur of all

things tech, had two computers—one that he had built himself for school and another that he had used for gaming. They were gone. All of my electronic schoolwork and documents. Gone. All of the papers that I had ever written. Gone. All of the sexy photos that I had taken of my 23-year-old self for Alan in the privacy of our own bedroom. Gone.

“Alan, we have evidence that you downloaded child pornography,” the investigator told him sternly as I watched helplessly from the other side of the room. Alan, who was sitting on the couch, became pale and actually fainted, and I remember rushing to get him a glass of water. After they left with all of our technological possessions in tow, we remained seated on the couch for what seemed like the entire day as we attempted to process what happened. How do you proceed after something like that? How do you interact with anyone? How can you possibly pretend that everything is still normal? What does it even mean to possess child pornography and what are the ramifications of that?

We had no idea.

I can look back and see how that day—how the impending doom of his certain conviction—completely and utterly paralyzed us both. I had just graduated from college with that shiny degree and was working at a retail job while looking for full-time work related to my discipline. But now I was suddenly stopped in my tracks. Like a slowly deflating balloon, I found myself shrinking socially, emotionally, and even physically. We were both pulled into a devastating downward spiral of depression and ill-health. My husband—forcefully disenrolled from college and declared persona non grata on campus—attempted suicide later that year just before the holidays. Thankfully, he was not successful in choosing the right kind of pills, and doctors were able to reverse the effects.

Alan was charged with five counts of possession of child pornography, though the investigator claimed in the

preliminary hearing that he had “thousands and thousands of images” on the computers they took during the search. We certainly had thousands of photos that we took with a cheap digital camera that I used (and certainly one of the crime lab investigators saw the risqué photos I took of myself) as well as a bunch of downloads of what were essentially memes and “funny pix” as I called them back in the day. Those “thousands and thousands” of pictures were not child pornography, the investigator explained during the hearing, but they were evidence that Alan was someone who was apt to curate legions of images for personal use, as if having scanned childhood photos, personal photos from our camera, innocuous internet downloads, and even computer system images was indicative of someone who would collect pictures of child pornography on an equally grand scale. The investigator stated that child pornographers typically do not delete images that they acquire and, after the crime lab completed their search, they found a total of five illegal images on his computer. Alan was also charged with criminal use of the university’s IT system since he used his school login to dial up to the internet when he downloaded the pornography.

Nearly one year later in the early summer of 2004, Alan was convicted of now just one count of possession of child pornography (“Sexual Abuse of Children,” they called it—an umbrella term that turned my stomach) and one count of criminal use of the university’s IT system. Just days before my 25th birthday, my husband was given the shameful, reprehensible, and ignoble title of sex offender. **Sex Offender**. Alan was now a **Convicted Sex Offender**. The idea that he was a sex offender shook us both to our very core. How could Alan possibly be a sex offender? He was smart, kind, sweet, and polite. He was a good kid—a harmless nerd! He was certainly not a sex offender! These were the early days of child pornography charges, and the judge said she would “make an example out of him” despite the fact that he was a university student working toward a degree and never had any

problems with the law in the past. She wanted to make sure others just like him knew that they were not immune to charges like this. He was placed on probation and was required to register under Megan's Law for 10 years. And thus it began.

Exactly one year after his conviction, we were evicted from our apartment as a result of our landlord finding Alan on the Megan's Law website. Alan, of course, was jobless as a patently unemployable registered sex offender, and the landlord knew that money was tight since we were behind on our rent. I was still working my low-paying retail job as I couldn't seem to gather any courage to find anything better. I was simply existing.

Our landlord at first said that he would be okay with us staying around as long as Alan could find work—which seemed absolutely impossible for anyone with that kind of conviction, but we would try. Things were calm for a few days until our landlord's wife developed deep concerns that Alan would “snap” around their grandchildren when they visited later that summer. The idea of him “snapping” and abusing a child was a disgusting thought to both of us, and we realized that the people we were renting from truly did not know who we were as human beings. They clearly didn't realize that it **could** be possible that the label of “sex offender” didn't exactly apply to Alan.

To add insult to injury, that very landlord admitted that he had looked at child pornography too, though somehow **he himself** was exempt from “snapping” around children. We scrambled to move to a large apartment complex in order to gain anonymity while deliberately omitting Alan's name from the lease, which meant that he had to be very careful about being seen. I remember wishing that I could just fold him up and put him into my pocket so no one could see him and hurt him.

Part IV, Barely surviving, will post Friday, June 7.