

“I’m a child rapist” – a story in four parts: Part IV

written by admin | May 10, 2019



Part IV: Heroes

My story has many heroes. First is my daughter who made this all possible. Without her courage to speak up and report my abuse, we would not be here today. She was 13 years old when she spoke up, and I cannot say often enough how very courageous she was in doing so. She has worked hard and long on her recovery and our family’s recovery, and I’m happy and proud to say that she didn’t give up on us, or on me. Today we are reconciled; she and her two children, my grandchildren, live with us in our shared home.

Then there is my wife of almost 30 years. At the beginning, she asked me three questions: (1) Did you do this? (2) Do you want/will you get help? and (3) Do you want to keep our family together? I answered yes to all three, and she was all in from that point forward. Through thick and thin, high and low, come hell or high water – and there were plenty of both – she stood by me, us, and our family. Over the years many have tried to

tear us apart, many have looked down their noses at her, asking how in God's name could she stand by me. She believed in us, and as long as I continued to answer the three questions yes, she promised to try – no guarantees of course, but try and try she did.

Next, there is my son, who was six years old at the time of my conviction. During my probation, he lost his father living with him for five important, formative years until he was eleven years old. Afterward, he spent his middle and high school years, traumatic enough by themselves, the son of a convicted sex offender. There were many school occasions and parties where he didn't receive invitations, and many times where friends suddenly couldn't be his friends any longer.

My extended family and friends never abandoned my family or me and were there for us all the way.

The final heroes are our trusted therapists; we were able to find both individual and family counseling that was tremendously helpful. They came alongside and offered us help, inspiration, and hope throughout our family's restoration journey. My therapist was a lifesaver in this story. Without one-on-one counseling, accountability, and his edifying relationship, I would still be lost today. Mere words cannot express my appreciation enough.

I can say honestly at the time, going through this, for all of us, it felt like it would never end, that we would never survive, couldn't survive. The cost was just too much, the guilt and shame too much to bear; we just couldn't. Looking back now some 18 years later, with us all being back together and reconciled, I think to myself, "Hell yeah, we could! We did!" And if we made it, so can you, but there has to be a better way. There has to be a more nurturing, edifying, restorative way!

Throughout this journey, I've learned many things; one of the

most important, however, is the difference between justice, mercy, and grace. Along the way, I learned a succinct way to describe the difference.

- **Justice** is when you get what you deserve;
- **Mercy** is when you don't get what you deserve,
- and **Grace** is when you get what you don't deserve.

My life and that of my family have been full of equal parts of all three, and for this, I'm ever so grateful; however, I feel like we may be the exception rather than the rule. I feel like there are so many more families out there who wish for mercy, pray for grace but see only justice. And while justice is important, the nature of justice is more important. Should justice be only a basal, normative response to a complex issue, rooted in doling out the most punishment possible to satisfy the victims and condemning offenders to ostracism, endless punishment, and dehumanizing public shaming? There is nothing restorative in our justice system today, and unfortunately, everyone loses, and not just the offenders but the victims as well, and certainly the families.

As for my family and me, we will continue to embrace the restorative justice way. We will, where possible, focus on the harm caused on all sides rather than just what the criminal statute demands. We will continue to stand up, speak out, and lean into the hard and messy conversations. We will strive to make the topic of sexual violence and victimization less taboo and give all, both offenders and those who are offended against, the opportunity to share, grow, and survive together.

Addendum from "Joe": I would like to thank everyone who read my story and took the time to offer comments. I am humbled that almost all comments were positive and supporting. I encourage each of you to advocate for the concepts of forgiveness, reconciliation, and restorative justice whenever and wherever you have the chance.

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