

Collateral damage – learning to live without regret: Part V

written by admin | June 15, 2019



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

Part V: A new way of life

By Daisy . . . As offenders and collaterally damaged family members know, living with a sex offense conviction is suffocating and paralyzing. It's like being in a strong current that pulls you deep into a huge, scary ocean where someone else controls the narrative that defines who you are. I cannot speak to Alan's complete experience as the one with the **actual** mark on his record, but I have lived in the deep pit of consequences.

I have always been overly sensitive to the environment around me. I internalized so much of Alan's experience, his fear, his anxiety, and his apprehension about the terrifyingly judgmental society that we now had to navigate. I **knew** deep down inside that Alan was a good man; I knew he still had all

of those qualities that I loved about him when I fell head-over-heels in love with him. But the pressure and the weight of the label he now wore like a permanent badge of *dishonor* changed both of us in irrevocable ways. I thought that literally anything else would have been more welcome than the label of "Convicted Sex Offender." He could have murdered someone and probably would have been accepted into society and employment much more easily. There were times when I wished that he *had* been successful at his suicide attempt; it would have wiped away all of the charges and he could have died as a respectable person with a clean record. I knew he was a good man and I still know this, but who would ever believe me?

It has been almost 16 years since that July morning when the police searched our apartment, so I have had some time to truly think about my long journey and to view my experience with more objectivity. I remember thinking how I just wanted to fast-forward the next ten years of my life after he was convicted. I couldn't bear to live through it. Unfortunately, the ten years was extended to 15 years due to a SORNA ruling in 2012, which was later rescinded in my state, but Alan still ended up spending a total of 14 years on the registry.

They say that the public registry is not punitive—that it's not a punishment, just a way to keep track of offenders—but I have to disagree. Being on a public registry is a sure-fire way to destroy a reputation, and your reputation is one of the few things that defines you throughout your life as you carry it with you like an immutable history book researchable by nearly anyone. It certainly limits your ability to find work, especially since you know that the subject of criminal history—no matter how distant in the past—will have to be broached at some point during the interview process.

Even though I wasn't on the list myself, I felt it vicariously. My address was on it and I was constantly in panic mode when I had to give it out. We purchased a post office box just so we had an extra layer of protection for

those times when I had to give an address to friends, employers, businesses, and even family. I was terrified that someone would search for my home address and see it pop up in the results as a residential location for a convicted sex offender. I would break out into a sweat anytime **anything** related to a sex offense was on the news because I knew that it would prompt searches. If someone ever knocked on my door or rang the doorbell while I was home, I would have a full-on panic attack and hide in a closet. I felt like a prisoner.

Being on the list changes your life in ways you would not expect. Halloween—once my favorite holiday—had become a day where we would turn off all of the lights and just wait for the night to be over. I have always wanted to travel around the world, but I cannot do so with my husband because many countries do not accept anyone with a sex offense record—no matter how much time has elapsed. We can't even move to another state without first notifying their justice department to determine if Alan will have to register—even though he completed his registry requirement and was the lowest-level offender in our home state. We just can't take that chance of having him on the registry again.

The registry “isn't punitive,” but we certainly lived in fear every single day that someone would decide to take retribution into their own hands. This fear prevented us from speaking to our neighbors for at least a year after moving into our house in late 2008. The following summer, I did my very best to avoid any conversation with my next-door neighbor as I worked outside. In fact, I would retreat indoors when she was outside so we would never have the opportunity to speak. My mother visited me once, and I admonished her for speaking to the neighbor, telling her that “she's weird and we don't talk to her.” My neighbor was, in fact, not weird; she turned out to be a very lovely person while **I** was the weird one.

We even decided not to have children—with Alan going as far as getting a vasectomy—because we were so worried about something

happening, no matter how irrational. But even the most irrational questions make sense when you have a sex offense conviction hanging over your head. What if our child were taken by the state because someone saw Alan's name on the list and made a false claim that he was an abuser? What if he were to pick up our child from school in an emergency and violate his registry requirements because of the 2,000-foot restriction for places where children congregate? What if other parents found out and ostracized our child? What if someone hurt our child as vigilante-driven retribution for the crime of the father? These are not normal things that normal couples with normal plans to have a normal life with a normal child have to face, but they were very, **very** real concerns to us. We had to pretend our entire adult lives that we simply didn't want to have children or to adopt children when, in actuality, we had wanted to be parents from the very beginning. This aspect of my life makes me very sad.

We had to have gallows humor about the whole situation or we just wouldn't have survived with our minds intact. We joked that Alan had his own state-sponsored social media page—he was **so** special that he had to update the police yearly with what he was up to. But, as much as I tried to have some humor about it just to get by, I also felt the sobering gravity of it every single day. It was an unseen misery that pervaded every pore of my being as I was constantly aware and hyper-vigilant for what might be on the horizon. It was a zero-sum game that I knew I would lose every time, so I employed some deep defense mechanisms, including humor, hiding, retreating into my own world, and protecting my privacy at all costs.

I would check his page maybe once a year, and I always found it strange to see his latest photo added into the array of past photos. Alan was a very handsome guy, but I could see the changes over time in his face not attributable to simple aging. He lost hair, the pallor of his skin became increasingly noticeable, his eyes became sunken and gray, he

grew slightly heavier, and he just looked sad, weary, and broken. The man that I loved—the man who was the brightest candle of light in my life—was viewed by others with absolute resentment and disdain. He was a “sexual abuser of children.” He was a disgusting pedophile.

While my peers were getting jobs, getting promotions, having babies, buying houses, buying cars, obtaining their graduate degrees, receiving awards and accolades for their work, supporting their families, and generally succeeding at “adulthood,” I was stagnating in a wretched and miserable cesspool of fear. I tend to look back on my adult life and think in terms of “should have” or “was going to”—I **should have** achieved this by that age or I **was going to** do this with my life. I believed that opportunities in the world would be handed to us due to being good, smart kids. “You are special!” is what we were told growing up. It is quite a blow to the ego to realize that this is decidedly **not** the case.

But I eventually figured out how to pull myself out of that cesspool and get on with living the life that I had.

Part VI will be posted June 22.