

# Collateral damage – learning to live without regret: Part VII-Conclusion

written by admin | June 29, 2019



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## Part VII: Getting Better

By Daisy . . . I am so proud of my husband for what he has achieved in the face of all of the difficulties and challenges that have confronted him over the past 16 years. Just six years ago, I would not have believed that it would be possible for him to obtain and keep a full-time job. But it was possible. In fact, since he entered the workforce in early 2013, he has had three jobs—each with a higher pay and more responsibility, including management. Even with his criminal record, he has exceeded my salary by a decent sum. I firmly believe that the key to this was the fact that he attended a community college that did not discriminate based on criminal history. Additionally, his time at school truly allowed him to flourish as he joined student groups and made friends.

After graduating, he felt like he had finally accomplished something, and he set upon trying to get his life back on track. There have been job interviews that he completely bombed because he had to talk about his criminal record. Businesses aren't always too happy to have a "pedophile" on their payroll or to have their company address on the list. Over time, Alan became more comfortable (if one can ever be comfortable talking about his sex offense crime) with talking about his criminal history with prospective employers. Of the three who hired him over the last six years, there were probably five that outright rejected him because of his past. There were several more that he never even told.

I admire Alan for his ability to talk to a prospective employer about his crime—though he certainly does not enjoy doing it. On the other hand, our lips have been completely sealed when it comes to family and friends. I'm not even sure if the lovely neighbor of ours knows. The thing is that the conviction is so incongruent with the person Alan is at his core that I cannot possibly bear to tell anyone—except the one special friend whom I grew to trust and the landlord ten years ago that I felt I had to tell. Other than that, no one knows our story. I don't want to burden them with the knowledge of our painful and difficult experience, but mostly I fear that I will not receive sympathy—and that's a risk I'm not willing to take. I have heard many hurtful words and generalizations about sex offenders, and they cut deeply into the definition of who I am and who Alan is. I would rather have everyone in my family and circle of friends think that we were both lazy and directionless in our 20s and early 30s instead of stricken and traumatized by a sex offense conviction.

Therefore, I wear an impermeable mask of privacy. I excel at throttling all of my feelings so no one is aware of the acute pain inside. I share very little about my life with others while instead devouring every minute detail of their lives. It's a defense mechanism that works quite well in social

services since I'm charged with listening anyway, so I slide by truly unnoticed. My story remains locked away because no matter how articulate I am or how eloquently I regale others with my journey, I know that there will be a crushing amount of judgment.

I know not to minimize his crime, but it is so difficult because I know that Alan is a good person. I know that he would never hurt anyone, much less a child. I know his intentions were not due to a sexually deviant perversion indicative of a desire to sexually molest children. But, on the other hand, I have heard people in professional positions—such as probation officers and county-appointed therapists and landlords in addition to random people full of outrage on the internet—say that people like Alan are incorrigible predators who should be sent to an island. So, while I try my darnedest not to minimize his offense, I also attempt to prevent the outside from polluting my empathy and ability to understand why someone would do something that is out of character, and **that** is why I do not share my story. I know Alan is not some demon predator and, likewise, I am not one myself for supporting and loving him. I am sure that there are other family members of convicted sex offenders who feel this exact same way.

In many ways, it seems that I do not actually deserve this very private pain that I feel because it just cannot be understood by so many. There is an absence of sympathy around this type of crime, so I build my walls high. Not only am I attempting to rebuild my toppled inner building, but I have already pre-built a fortress around it—one that nothing can penetrate. I'm always vigilant—as I'm sure most sex offenders and their family members have trained themselves to be. I'm always ready for the next law to swoop in and change my life even though Alan hasn't been on the registry for over a year. I'm always prepared to put up my defenses in case someone finds out. It's hard to live life on a knife edge like

this—and it has abated to a small degree since he was removed from the registry—but it has come to be part of who I am as a person.

However, I always try to take something positive from all of the experiences in my life, and at least I can say that this constant awareness and vigilance that I feel has truly made me understand the absolute need for privacy. In my job in social services and as a human being in general, I respect others' confidentiality and privacy to an unbelievable degree. I say nothing negative, I don't pry, and I keep secrets forever. I know what it's like to completely lose any semblance of privacy, which is why I recognize how profoundly important and precious it is.

This whole voyage through my adult life has been, to a great degree, an out-of-body experience where part of me is on the outside simply observing the occurrence of everything in a sort of astonished daze. I have become humbled. Extremely humbled. I am a much different person than I was in 2003. Alan is a much different person—probably even more so than I. I would be amiss to say that I'm not terribly damaged, but I proved to myself that I was stronger than I ever knew I could be, and we proved that our love for each other is ***absolutely impervious***. And the love we have for each other is what keeps me going every single day. I hope others in my situation have something like that to get them through as well.

My life has been really confusing and disorienting and painful and destructive. But it has also been beautiful and educative and profound and full of love. I know that there must be so many others out there who have helplessly stood by as I have or who have been directly affected by a similar ordeal while feeling the same series of emotions that I have felt. I know from my personal experience that you feel lost, hollow, angry, sad, depressed, anxious, hopeless, and despondent. I know that you feel undeserving of your pain. I know that you feel the need to put up barriers of mental protection because you know

that no one else could possibly understand and accept the burden of your situation. You know you are a good person deep down, but you feel like no one will believe you.

I can tell you that I am at least one real person in this world who can empathize with you—whether you're a family member or an offender. We all make stupid, idiotic, thoughtless decisions without realizing the consequences of our actions. I bet there are a lot of people out there like us who thought they were smart and special, and maybe they were a little over-confident in their ability to navigate this world and reach their goals without hitting any major obstacles. I'm speaking to those people who thought they had it made but were so ignorant to the fact that just one small mistake could have the power to derail their whole life as it did mine and Alan's. I truly empathize with you, and it breaks my heart to know that this happens to others.

Just know that life does get better. It takes a lot of time and patience, but it does get better. And by writing those words, I am forcing myself to believe it—though I do see it in my life now every single day. Things **do** get better if you let them. An experience like this tests your strength. It tests your resolve to actually live your life instead of just floating through it like a defeated shell of a person hanging on to a deflated balloon while a soul-shaking earthquake topples the inner scaffolding of what makes you **you**. It's hard to not let that big ocean gobble you up and pull you to the very bottom. Hopefully, you can prove to yourself that you can survive this.

Like me, you are stronger than you realize.