

A Hand to Hold

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NB.The child depicted on the cover is neither a client, nor has she ever been a client of Rosie's Place Inc. The child photographed is a relative of the photographer.

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Acknowledgements

It wasn't meant to be.

The book that you are about to read is not what this book was meant to be. It was originally intended to be an information booklet for children who were to attend the criminal court as witnesses in regard to their allegations of sexual assault. There was also an intention to perhaps provide an addendum in the form of advice to parents and family members who were supporting their child through the legal process. Those worker-initiated ideas were then taken to our clients to begin a process of consultation as to what information and advice this booklet should contain.

This project was to be started and completed in six months but now, over two years later, we have something which is so different from those early tentative steps of writing a resource. The numerous consultations held with children, parents, and family members over that period of time makes it difficult to be exact about the number of clients whose voices have contributed to this book. We could “guesstimate” that well over fifty parents and at least the same numbers of children attended both group and individual consultations sessions and we could further guess that hundreds of worker hours have been spent scribing, translating and transforming the many words spoken.

In her book, *The Hearts Narrative*, Johnella Bird (2000, 30) talks of those moments of engaging with clients when “engaging with talk that sings brings us closer to the experience of poetry than to the experience of objective scientists”. We believe that

this description best fits our experience as workers in the development of this book. We do not apologise for the lack of scientifically based research but ask you instead to read and acknowledge the poetic research that arose when we listened to the many voices of our clients who so generously gave us the time to describe their experiences and their insights.

We wish to acknowledge the children and adults who spoke with us, patiently guided us through their experiences and then gave us their trusted permission to document such personal stories. We acknowledge their hope that their shared experiences may serve as a source of encouragement to those who are still seeking justice and offering a hand to hold when their child speaks of sexual assault against them.

We wish to acknowledge the members of our team including Melissa Wightman and Chris Kulyk who contributed to the writings and continued to instill in us a belief in the worth of this document. We also thank our administrative worker Nicole La Rosa who calmly finished the unfinished and found the lost pages.

To the co-ordinator of our service, Patricia Williams we acknowledge the absolute commitment to the importance of this book, the ability to find the resources to financially support it's publication, and the skills she mastered in order to shift her position from co-ordinator to designer and publisher. The hours upon hours that she poured into this work make the pages of words a cohesive written text.

A Hand to Hold

We also wish to acknowledge the community of women who so strongly support our organisation and remind us of the powerful solidarity that exists when women unite in common purpose.

To Mary Jo McVeigh, who reminds us of the hope we must hold onto that perhaps one day children will be safe and the determination to fight for those who are yet to find this right.

To Sheridan Linnell, who patiently listens to our mistakes and misgivings and gently guides us through those moments of doubt and frustration to regain the belief in the work we do.

Finally, and with perhaps our most heartfelt thanks, we acknowledge the continued support of Margret Roberts in the development of this book. As a worker and educator in the field of sexual assault, Margret has always advocated for the voices of clients, especially children and mothers, to be heard. As our consultant to this project she encouraged us to shift in the direction that the stories were taking us. She reminded us of the importance of this document when the task at times felt overshadowed by the demands of other work commitments. She enlightened us with her knowledge and passion as to the purpose of this book when at times we felt constrained by anxiety that the work would never reach completion.

Some things just aren't meant to be but perhaps some other things are.

Cathy Want and Ruth Crew



A Hand to Hold

PART ONE

FACING THE TRUTH

A Hand to Hold

"Take my hand"

How many times do you say this in your life when you are the mother of a child?

You say this when they cross the road...

You say this when they start at school...

You say this when they go to see the doctor..

You say this when you have to walk past a strange dog

You say this when you are in a crowd of people.

You give your hand to let them know you care for them.

You give it to let them know that they are precious to you.

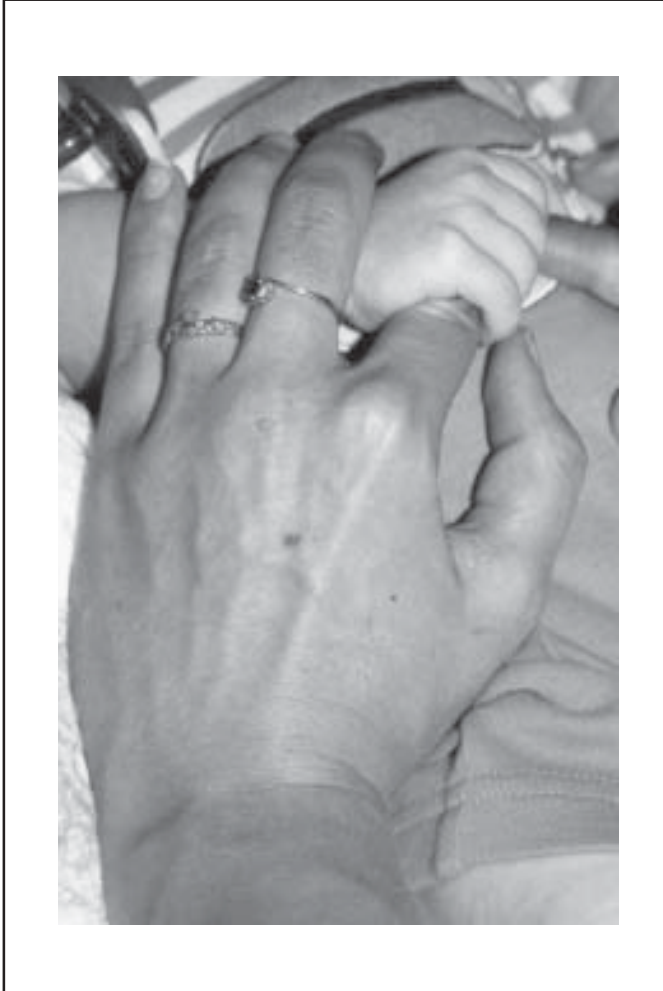
You give it to let them know that they are not alone.

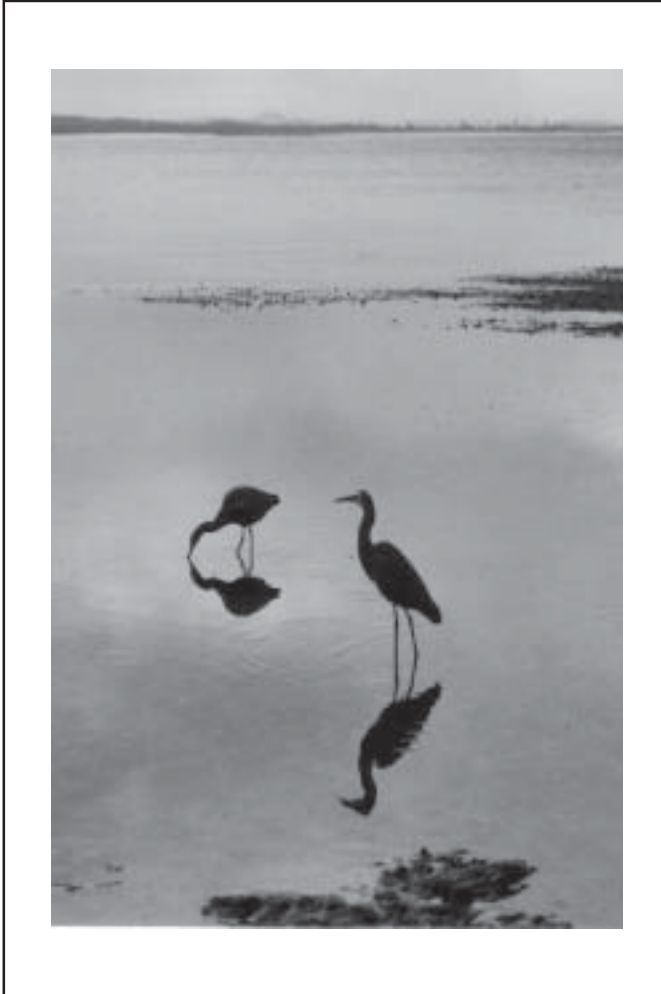
You give it to let them know that their fears can be shared with you.

You give it to let them know that you will do all you can to keep them safe.

And when they feel most alone and most afraid you give it because it's a part of you that they can hold onto - to know that you are there with them.

When you discover that your child has been sexually assaulted something as simple as having a hand for them to hold is often the best you can give.





GATHERING THE STRENGTH

Storytellers

This book of writings and stories came from a shared fellowship between many mothers and children we meet in our work and us, as child sexual assault workers.

The idea for this book grew from countless conversations about the enormity facing children and their families when they attempt to make the criminal justice system of this country accountable for the crime of child sexual assault.

From a series of consultation sessions with mothers and children we have collected experiences, reflections and testimonies about their endeavours to seek justice. Mothers and children in this work are as ‘one’ in this work, because we have been made aware that any act of sexual assault committed against a child is also an act committed against those closest to that child. This person is most often the child’s mother.

In our consultations with families over the last few years, we became determined that the stories we have been privileged to hear would produce a ‘manuscript of truths’ that celebrate the great courage and fortitude shown by these children and their families.

What do the mothers say?

We initially consulted with mothers who had supported their children through the criminal justice system about what they see as the important things to share. For most of them a criminal conviction was never recorded against the offender and for many others the matter never reached court. It was envisaged that these women would take us through individual experiences of seeking justice through the processes available. They all carried strong memories of their individual journey and it was important to gain some understanding of what each had endured.

However, for all of them, they unanimously stated that although they would never want to repeat this experience, they believed at the time that they had no choice. Asked if they would repeat the experience, they unanimously stated that was unimaginable, because again there would be no choice.

Collectively, most mothers felt a strong sense of personal injustice about the wrongs committed not only against their child but also against their integrity and identity as a parent. They believed that the only way to try and recapture such losses was to fight for justice and pursue it with all the strength they had.

Basic Justice

It may, in the end, be the only justice you have to cling to - that basic sense of justice that you hold for yourself that totally belongs to you.

It may not have any power in terms of getting an offender to admit the truth or face court or be found guilty or be sentenced to gaol, but it has a power that helps sustain you when you take a stand about the fact that your child has been sexually assaulted.

You teach your children right vs. wrong.
You teach them that there are repercussions for the wrong that people do.
You teach them about decency and respect for others.
You teach them about being responsible for their actions and the importance of facing the consequences of those actions.

How can you walk away from that teaching?
You want the same justice to apply for them and any wrongdoing against them that you teach as a parent.

It's that basic.

What do the children say?

We also consulted with children who had participated as witnesses in the criminal justice system. This was a different pathway from that which we travelled with parents.

The focus of the children was not on talking about their views of the legal system or their experience in being a part of this system. From their accounts it seemed as if they had travelled through the legal tunnel in a cocoon type module, bumping and scraping the walls and certainly being shaken about, but somehow buffered from the full impact of the trip. It was their descriptions of the cocoon rather than the tunnel which became uppermost in their storying with us.

The cocoon lining was named by the children in their own terminology and perceptions. We hope we have represented their language with respect and truthfulness. As adults, and to assist in clarifying the central themes that appeared to be important to the children, we describe that cocoon as possessing several layers, each important and vital to the sustenance of children during their contact with the criminal justice system.

One layer is a child's natural striving to embrace their childhood, serving as a buffer against adult imposed trauma.

Another protective layer is the strength of their relationship with their main carers and other people in their life who surround them, believe them and promise them support and safety.

Finally, there are those elements of the legal system itself which they identified as believing and supportive. Such features of the System carried children through their fears and guided them through unknown and uncharted territory.

Wombat Stew

The best way of encapsulating the messages conveyed to us by children about their experience in the legal system is to refer to a child's adaptation of the popular children's book, 'Wombat Stew' (Vaughen, 1985).

My mum makes a casserole called Wombat Stew.
When we ask what's for tea and she says "Wombat Stew",
We know this means that we don't really now what we're getting.
Her wombat stew has a bit of this and a bit of that.
Some of it looks a bit rotten and some of it looks good.
So to eat the stew you try to pick up the rotten bits with the good bits.
This makes it go down and it still tastes OK.
For me court was a bit like mum's wombat stew.
You didn't know what was going to happen and you knew there were some rotten bits that you had to swallow.
There were also the good bits to help you get through the whole lot.



We Believe

Fundamental beliefs of practice which guide us are:

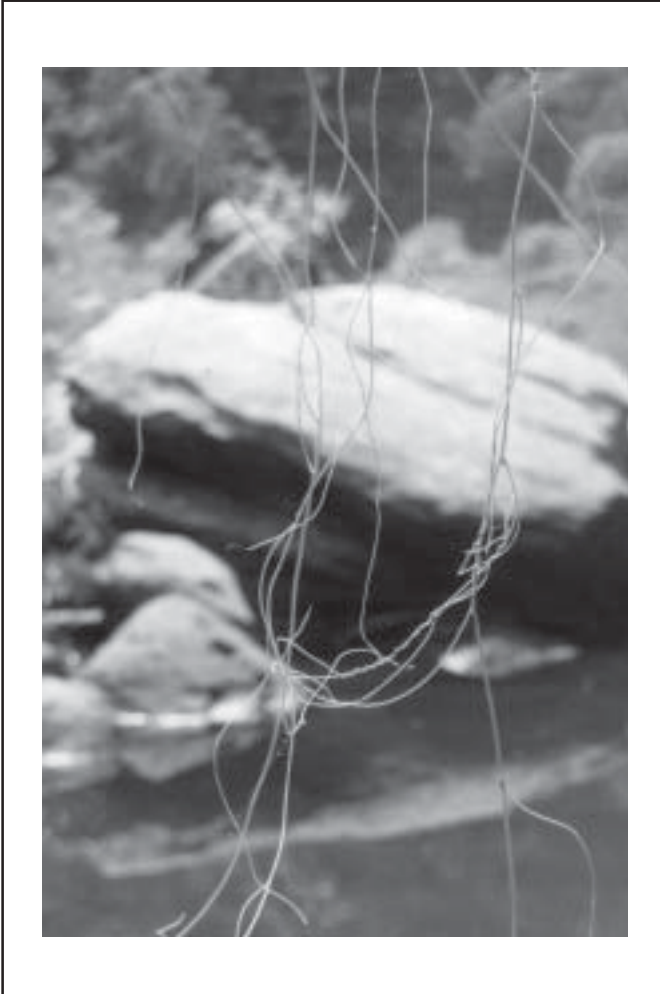
- sexual assault is a crime for which offenders are responsible and should be made answerable for their actions, wherever possible, through the criminal legal processes.
- respect for the judicial process, no matter how difficult or unfair that route may seem, is crucial if there is to be any chance of offenders being forced to take full responsibility for the crimes they have committed.
- ensuring that all discussions with clients, including information provided, does not interfere with the legal process, in terms of contamination of evidence.

Most importantly, we recognise the trust so generously given by the children and families who allow us to accompany them through this most harrowing and painful path in their lives.

They accept our ignorance of their pain with generous compassion, they give us their patience when we are late with a task that we made a commitment to complete, they allow us to talk with their children, they at times entrust us with their child's care.

They share with us their most intimate and private pain and allow us to laugh with them, sigh with them and sit silently with them when we have no further response to ease the burdens they carry. They have given our own lives such enrichment by witnessing their dignity, commitment and strength.





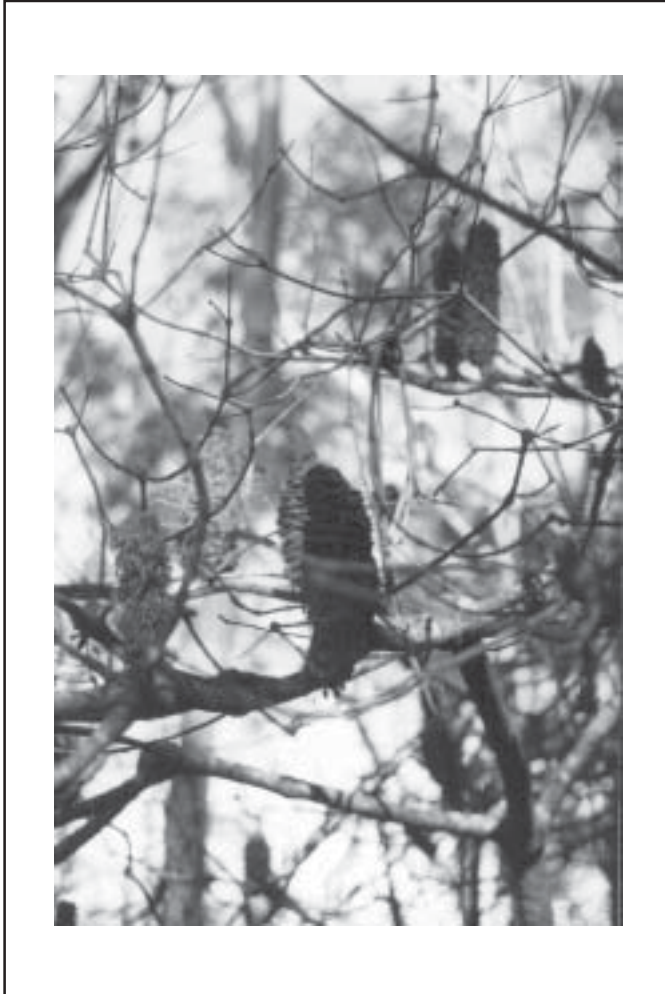
CHAPTER ONE

SPINNING THE WEB

**Along came a spider
And sat down beside her
And frightened her childhood away**

An Ordinary Man

He's in your neighbourhood
He's in your street
For some children he's in their house
His children go to the same school as your
children
Sometimes they play together
This ordinary man offers to watch over them
while they play
I see them in the front yard, laughing and playing
I see this ordinary man washing his car
He's mowing the lawn
Then he's talking to the neighbour over the
fence
An ordinary scene in an ordinary street about
an ordinary man
But nothing's really ordinary
Things are not always what they seem
And this not so ordinary man
Took our ordinary life from us



Grooming

Research undertaken into the acts of “grooming” by offenders provides valuable knowledge about their process of setting up the abuse, often long before their sexual acts against a child begin (Conte & Wolfe, 1989).

Building trust. This is often the first step that offenders take when setting up the sexual abuse of a child. Children really don’t have a choice but to trust adults, especially those who have a close interaction with their lives or on whom they depend. Offenders work hard to develop the story of that trust by acts that should be without a price, especially the price of abuse. Spending time with a child, giving attention, buying presents, saying things that make a child believe they are valued and that this adult would never do anything to hurt them, establish bonds of unquestioned trust.

Keeping the secret. Offenders have to make the child keep the secret of the abuse and therefore have to make it impossible for a child to tell. For many children there is uncertainty about what is actually happening as offenders have often started their actions as seemingly harmless contact. This can include bathing the child or wrestling or tickling or saying things in a sexual way that appears to be a part of the normal conversation.

Offenders then define the child's experience as normal with verbal confirmation e.g.. 'This is fun isn't it?' Once offenders know that they have the child entrapped they then increase their sexually exploitative behaviour.

Staying trapped. As the child's realization grows that they want the abuse to stop, or as the sexual touching increases, children find themselves caught in a situation that they cannot escape. They may be threatened with punishment if they tell, such as being sent away or no longer being loved by those close to them, or that they and the people close to them will be hurt. The strongest signal of their entrapment is when children, pleading for the abuse to stop, bargaining for reprieve, even at times strongly saying "no", find that the offender does not respond, does not stop, but rather increases both his abuse and his actions of control.

Spinning out. The relationship of the non-offending adults with the offender is also controlled by deliberate actions of his manipulation and control. While the grooming of the child is occurring, a parallel process is happening with those close to the child. Using the acts of deceit, fabrication of truth, and controlling the child's relationship with the non-offending carer, perpetrators of abuse are diligent in their manoeuvres to sustain the abuse.

Let's call it for what it is

Isolation Don't speak to your mother like that.....Go to your room

And stay there until I say otherwise.

Separation She didn't mean what she said....It's just her age.

Let me go and talk to her...you look so tired

Confusion You liked it when I touched you before.....I'll just rub you until you fall asleep

Does that feel better?

Secrecy Don't worry your mother...she's not well.....This has to stay our secret

No one else would understand

Betrayal This will be the last time...I promise.....You know I love you the most

You know your mother thinks it's OK

Silence Goodnight darling..sweet dreams...Have you brushed your teeth

I'll send your mother in to say goodnight.

Wonderland costs a lot

He took me to lots of great places

We did lots of special things together

He would take me to Wonderland and go on the scariest rides with me

He was the only one who went with me

He would take me to the park and we would ride bikes

He would make sure my brakes were right and I had my helmet on

He would take me to the beach and stand with me when the big waves came

He would help me jump over them and make sure I didn't go under the water

He said he would always look after me

He lied

A snake in the grass

I had to try and find ways to keep away
from him

I stayed with my brother as much as I
could....
But even with my brother in the next
room playing his Nintendo he would find
me

I stayed outside as much as I could
But even when I was outside hiding in
the tree he would find me

I changed the times I did things
Like have my shower early before he got
home....
But he would get home early and he
would find me

I changed the things I did
Like not watch TV in the lounge room....
But he would then do the things I did
and he would find me

He always knew who I was with
He always knew what I was doing
He always knew where I was and
He always would find me

The Helping Hand

The neighbour spent a year endearing himself to my family, especially to my daughter and myself.

My daughter came to enjoy spending time with him, specially helping him feed his birds and she loved watching his big screen T V. He always offered her favourite food treats and gave her small gifts.

He endeared himself to my daughter to the extent that she wished he was her stepfather. He always lent a helping hand.

Even on the day he sexually assaulted my precious daughter he came up to me for a friendly chat.

His interest was not in appreciating or enjoying my daughter's company but his interest was in eventually sexually assaulting her.

Couldn't.....shouldn't.....wouldn't

I use to think he couldn't help doing it

Somehow...for some reason

Then I thought he shouldn't have done it

No matter what

Now I think someone who cares for you

Wouldn't do it

Never ever

Not Seeing the Forest for the Trees

If you look back from a distance you can see the forest

It's immense and overwhelming in how wide it has spread

But when you're in the forest you can only see the trees around you

In a forest of sexual abuse, trees are carefully planted to keep you lost and trapped in that forest

Trees that tell you that he will take care of everything

Trees that say he is there to look after you and your family

Trees that say you look tired and need a break so go rest or even better, go out for the evening

Trees that say your child's attitude to you as her mother is not acceptable and will be taken care of

A Hand to Hold

T rees that say your child needs special time to make her feel wanted and he will do that for her

T rees that say she shouldn't be out with those friends because of their bad influence

T rees that say she is heading for trouble and he will be putting his foot down

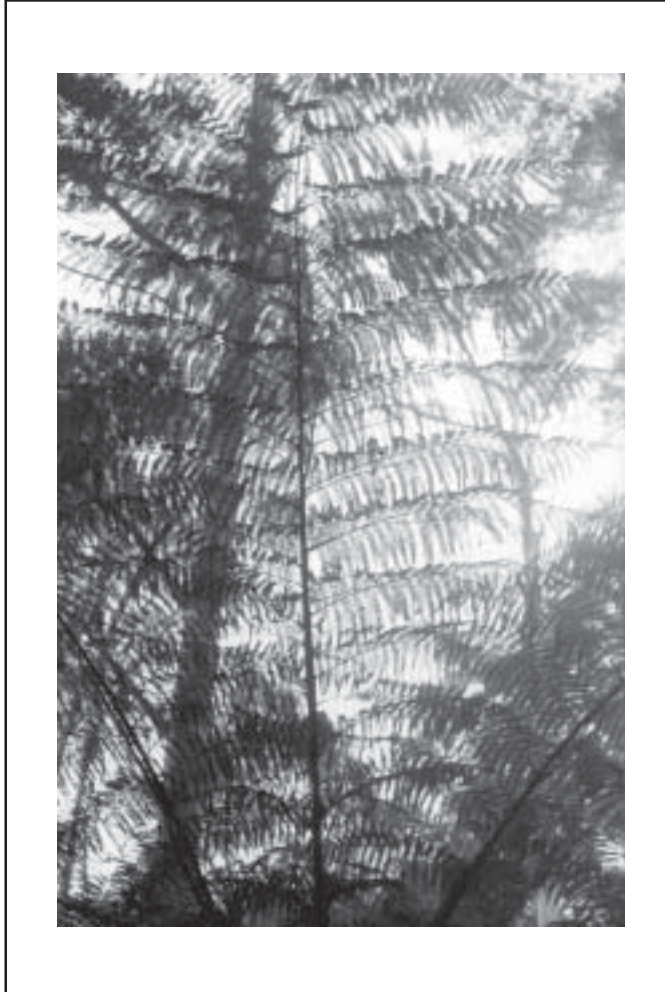
T rees that say you can't manage her so he will take over

T rees that say she is using you and has no respect for you

T rees that say she can't be trusted to have a lock on her door

T rees that say if it wasn't for him things would be in a worse situation

And while you stay lost in the forest you can't get out and no one can get in





CHAPTER TWO

TELLING MOMENTS

Nothing to something

I said to myself that I wouldn't tell

There was too much to lose if I told

I was too worried about what he
would do if I told

So I said nothing

Everyone else is OK

And I'm getting along OK

I was still scared but not as scared as
if I told

So I said nothing

And then he started again

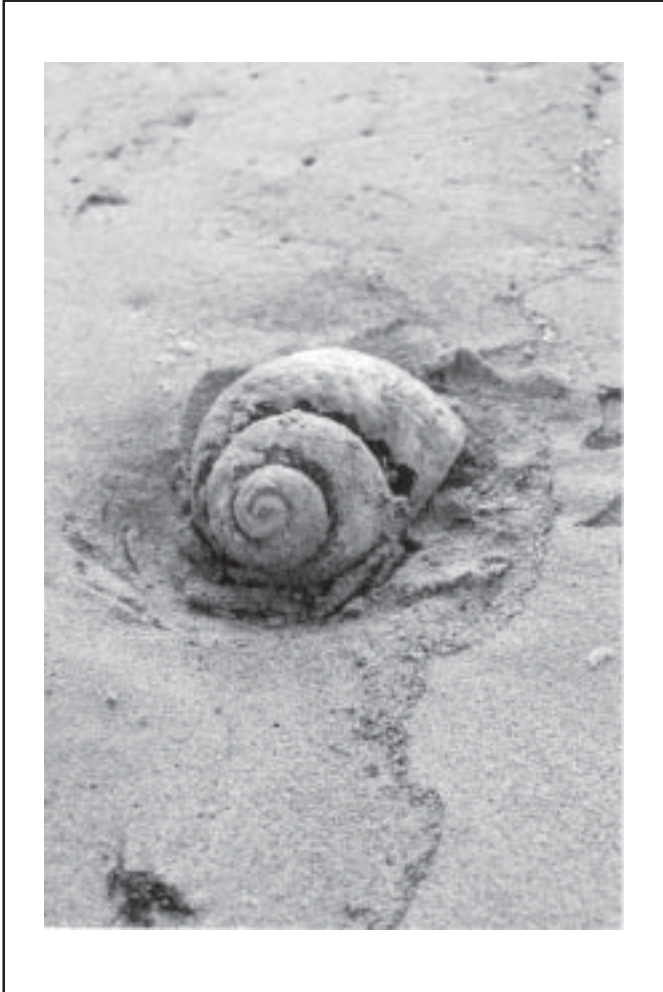
He started to come near to me

And I heard that breathing

And I smelt his smell

And I saw his hands

So I said something



No....Go....Tell

This phrase has long been used in “Protective Behaviour” classes. The scenario of a child being approached by someone in a car and being asked to get in, has set the stage for teaching children to say “no” to the stranger, run away, and tell someone immediately what has happened.

When children are sexually assaulted, the tactics used by offenders to entrap children, and the usually close relationship they have formed with their prospective victim, makes the belief about how children can protect themselves a fanciful notion.

There are two strong facts about a child telling about sexual assault that coexist: you must have one to make the other mean something.

- Telling about being sexually assaulted may be the hardest thing for a child to do.
- When children do tell, they must be believed.

Recent studies about how children often delay telling about the abuse indicate that:

- Older children fear the negative consequences of telling more than younger children.

- Children who are sexually assaulted by a family member are likely to tell much later.
- Children who have a lot of fear about the consequences of telling and feeling very responsible, delay disclosure (Goodman et al., 2003).

Younger children may show either physical or behavioural signs of assault which may be noticed by adults and lead to telling when asked. Adolescents, on the other hand, are more likely to tell someone about the abuse as part of their growing awareness of what has happened to them and becoming more independent of the abuser.

Unfortunately the younger and the older age children, may be seen as lacking credibility. Younger children, they may be seen as making up stories, or being made to say something untrue by another adult. Even when believed, their age makes criminal prosecution very difficult. Adolescents may lack credibility as they are portrayed as angry at the world and may be accused of making false allegations.

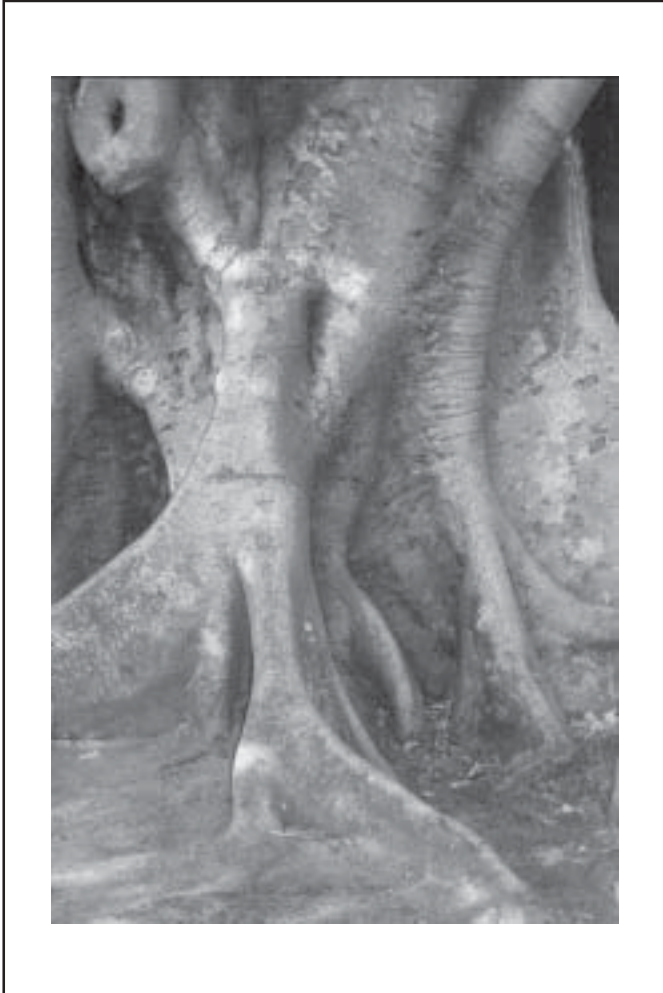
Keeping the assault a secret is an offender's greatest power and he will resort to any tactic to scare a child, and make the child feel that they are to blame or will not be believed. The message to the child is that worse things will happen if they expose the crime.

Just Say "NO"?

In protective behaviours they say that you say "No". You sit in the class and think that everyone knows you haven't said "No". You feel as though you're going to swallow your tongue right into your stomach. You feel so bad because you didn't say "No". Not like that...just "No". You didn't go or run away. You just stayed there because you didn't know what else to do. You didn't tell. You failed being a good child and you feel it's your fault for not being able to just say "No".

OR what if you did try to say it and he didn't stop anyway. He just got angrier or didn't talk to you at all or did something worse.

You won't even try to say "No" again.



It's all in the timing.

We asked the children what the most important steps were for them being made to feel safe. We asked them to outline these as footprints. Mistakenly, we put “telling someone that you have been sexually assaulted” as the first step. The children chorused that telling was something that came long after those first attempts at getting away from the abuse they had experienced. We retrace their footsteps on the following pages.



Knowing *that something
that you thought is wrong is
really wrong.*

He said that this was what all fathers do
but how come it feels yukky?

Sometimes I can't breathe but he doesn't
seem to notice that

He watches and waits all the time for a
chance to get at me

He's mean to me if he hasn't touched me
for a while

I start to feel really sad after tea
because I know it's going to happen soon

***Hoping that it will stop
and making wishes for it
to stop***

He said that he wouldn't do it again

He said he was sorry

He said that he was only playing and didn't
mean to hurt me

He seems to be acting normal so maybe
it'll stop

It hasn't happened for a while so maybe
it's over

Realising that it isn't going to stop and you have to try to do something about it.

Trying lots of different things

.....Like wearing two pairs of trackpants at night, **or** pretending you are asleep so he'll go away, **or** making yourself throw up so you smell bad and your mum will think you're sick and will stay with you, **or** trying to be extra bad so he won't like you any more, **or** trying to be extra good so he might like you and won't want to do this stuff **or** hiding so he can't find you, **or** cutting your hair so he thinks you look ugly, **or** pretending it isn't happening to you but someone else and it's really a dream that you wake up from the next day.

Knowing that no matter how much you try, things aren't changing and the only thing that you can do is to tell someone.

Getting scared and going back to step 2 where you hope it will stop. Telling is risky and scary and you think of all the things he has said "if you tell"

If you tell.....I will hate you

Your mum will hate you and she will not believe you

I will be in trouble and go to gaol

You will be in trouble and will go to gaol

I'll take your mum away from you and you'll never see her again

I will bash you

I will kill your mum

I will kill your dog

I will tell everyone it was your idea

***Thinking of all the people
you could tell and
wondering if they might
believe you***

My mum might believe me but what if she says something to him

My grandma would believe me but she's too old and this could make her sick

I tried to tell my sister before but she just didn't get it and what could she do anyway

My teacher would believe me but she would tell my mum and she would tell him and everything would be worse

I could tell my best friend but she would tell my mum and here we go again

And what if they don't believe me...blame me...hate me.... what if he finds out that I have told

Finding the right time and saying over and over what you think are the right words..... Then getting scared and saying something that doesn't make any sense because you only say a bit

I don't want to go in the car today
My tummy hurts...I feel sick
I don't want to go to bed now
Can I sleep over at Jenny's?
I don't want them to come over. I hate them
I don't want to wear my pyjamas to bed.
It's too cold
I'm worried about something
My friend thinks she's a bad person and everyone hates her
Sometimes I just want to live with you mum on our own

Or changing your mind about saying anything and having to make a new plan all over again

Telling

Don't know why or how or when or anything except that you've told and it made sense and you wait to be believed.



Mum's the Word

Mum! Mum! MUM!
MuuuuuuuuuuMMMMMMMMMM1
Where are you?
Can you hear me?
Why aren't you answering me?

Mum?
Where's my clothes?
Where's my lunch?
Where's my shoes?
What's for breakfast?
What's for tea?
Did you get that book for me?
Can you find that letter from school?
Can you give me the money for the
excursion?
Can I get a haircut this afternoon?
Can Jamie come over and play?
Can I sleep over at her house?
Are you driving me to school?
Why do I have to walk
Can you come to the school assembly
this week and see my play?

Mummmmmmmmm!!!!

So many questions asked of you in such a short time. It's a few seconds and they have told you so much.

But why couldn't she have asked me those other questions that I now know she had?

Mummmm!

Is it OK for him to be touching me that way?

Do you know it's happening 'cause he said you did?

What will you say when I tell you?

Will I be in trouble?

Will you get angry with me?

Will you stop loving me?

Will I be sent away?

Will he hurt you if I tell?

Will you believe me?

Why couldn't she have asked me those questions?

It only takes a few seconds.

Why couldn't she just yell out

Mummmmmmm?????

The Telling

You asked me why I didn't tell you?
I should have but I couldn't
I tried... a few times.. but I just couldn't
I don't really know why
If you ask I'll say I don't know
And then you'll be angry with me
You'll blame me

You will think that maybe it's not true
If I told you I couldn't look at you

I couldn't just say: "Hey, mum guess
what?"
I couldn't say: "So please don't ask me why
I didn't tell you"
Just know that I couldn't
Just believe me now and know that I
couldn't
It only takes a second to believe.

Telling is the hardest thing. There are lots
of reasons why you can't tell

You are afraid

You don't know what is happening really
except you don't like it and want it to
stop

You are embarrassed that someone is doing these things to you

You feel hurt and sad

You have lots of worries that make you feel sick inside. But you have to tell to get it to stop

You think it is your fault and you will be in trouble

You can say no but that won't make it stop. Maybe for a while but not forever

To tell once...twice. Three times. This is also the most important thing to do

You may not know it at the time but it is the only thing to do. To be able to tell other people what has been happening

You have lots of questions about what people will do

What would make people believe you?

Why would they believe you and not him?

What might stop people believing that you are telling the truth?

What will he say to people to make them believe him?

A Hand to Hold

You have lots of worries about not being believed

There are also worries about him finding out that you've told and what he will do now and what he will say and if he will hurt you more?

People like him. He does lots of nice things for other people

And you're just a kid!

You get in trouble and lose things and wet the bed and get angry with your mum and fight at school and hit your brother

And when they no longer believe you, what will happen to you then?

You tell, then wait to be believed

Finding first

The first lot are people in your life who believe you
Some you may know really well, others just a bit, and others not at all
They believe you and listen to the important things you have to say

The second lot are others in your life who can't believe you - maybe they're not strong enough or not ready yet to believe or he's tricking them too

You've got to find the first lot because they're the ones you need around when you tell. If you tell the second lot you're wasting your time and you could get in more trouble

You've got to find first

Bravehearted

You're really brave for telling
You have a lot of courage
It must have been hard for you to tell
someone but you were strong enough to
do so
When you tell that someone has sexually
assaulted you.....you don't really feel
brave
You're so scared and worried and upset
You don't want to talk to anyone
You want to run away and hide and not
let people see you
You feel sorry for yourself and sad for
yourself and your family.
You feel bad for yourself and you can't
make yourself feel better
Being scared makes you feel like someone
has punched you in the stomach and then
the chest
Your heart goes really fast like you're
going to have a heart attack
You feel like you're going to burst
Like a big black balloon that's filled up
inside with bad things
You feel like you're all alone
Being brave is being able to face some-
thing scary

It's standing up for yourself
It's not letting people bully you or other
people

Being brave is riding your skateboard or a
BMX bike

Being brave is playing soccer and tackling
the big kicker

Or facing a fast bowler in cricket

Being brave is making a speech in class or
singing in front of the whole school.

Being brave is being loud and saying what
you think

Being brave is doing something that makes
people think you're tough and cool

Being sexually assaulted and telling
someone happens because you don't know
what else to do

You want it to stop and you don't know
how to make it stop

You don't know if you're right or wrong or
stupid or bad

Telling someone that you are being
sexually assaulted isn't brave

It's just that you don't have a choice and
you don't know what else to do

A Hand to Hold

There is so much you want to be brave about but this isn't one of those things. Kids can get heavy with worries and fears and think of all the things that can now happen

Sometimes this feels worse than before they told because they don't know what's going to happen. They can feel afraid again

Tell them they don't have to do this by themselves and there are people who will keep them safe

Believe them



Loud and Clear

Having told and being believed and removed from further abuse the children we spoke with had a long list of ideas for how, in the best of all worlds, children should be able to tell that they are being sexually assaulted.

Excuse me mum but I am being sexually assaulted by....

Scream at them: "Listen to me I have something important to say."

Give an adult some hurt so they might know how you are feeling and ask you what's wrong.

Give out pictures of people asking for help and then point at yourself.

"Please listen to me"

Write a poem and give it out to different people to read. Someone might ask you what it's about.

Leave your diary open.

Write letters and stick them on walls or post them, even if only to Santa in the North Pole.

You see I know that Santa's not real but someone at the post office might read it.

Start asking questions about sexual assault and how a child who is being sexually assaulted might be able to let someone know.

Yell at them: "Fix your ears or make them bigger so you can hear me".

Scream at them: "Take me to the police".

Tell a teacher that you're scared and want to live with them.

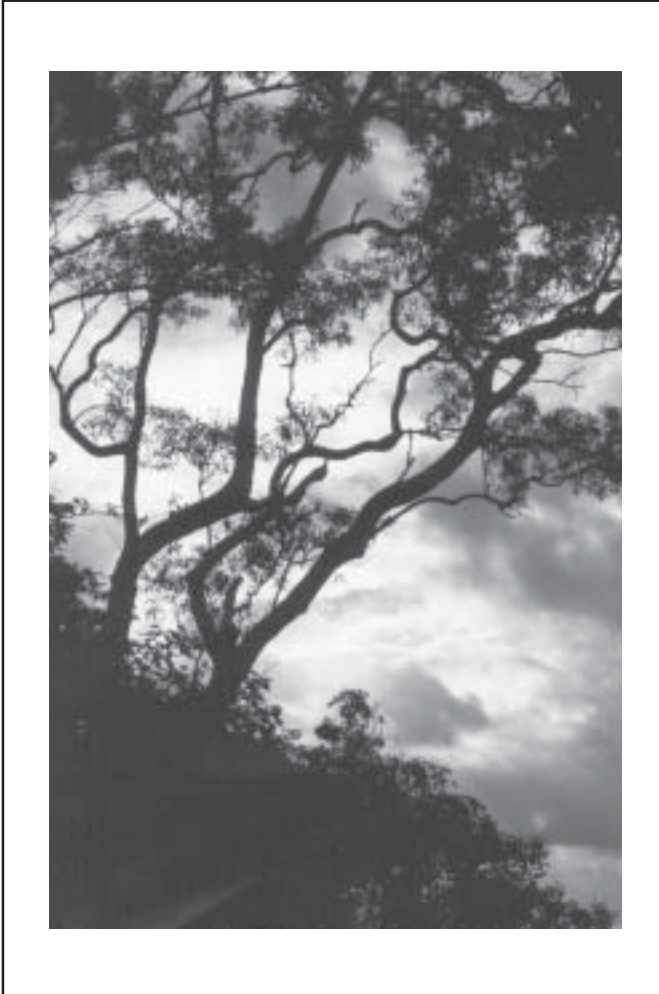
Tell a friend or a cousin and ask them if they will tell an adult and not to keep it their secret.

Just say: "Help me".

Describe the person who hurt you to someone responsible like Kids Helpline.

Run away - people will want to know why if you keep doing it.

Just tell the truth and keep on telling till someone believes you and makes you safe.



CHAPTER THREE

RECEIVING THE NEWS

invisible Poison

The day you discover that your child has been sexually assaulted you swallow a poison that stays in every part of your being

It meanders its way throughout your body and seeps into your mind

Its sickly taste makes you feel nauseated

It lies in your stomach, your chest, your throat, your head

You feel it within you every day-every moment

For a mother the guilt that you must swallow when you hear that your child has been sexually assaulted serves to punish you and remind you that you were not there to protect her

And every day you face as the mother of a child who has been sexually assaulted you must take in more of that unforgiving venom that guilt has saved for you

When people ask you :Why didn't you know?...Where were you at the time?
Why didn't she tell you?...How could you let yourself be fooled by this man?

When people look at you with silent mistrust for as a mother you should have been able to keep your child safe

When people speak to you but don't speak with you about your pain

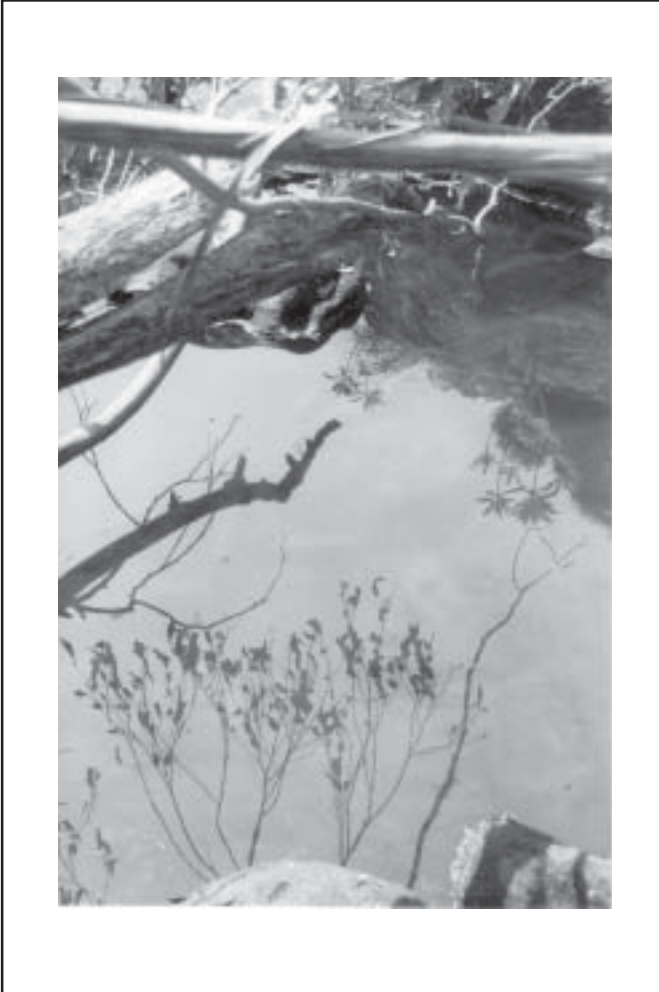
When people spend time with you but don't spend time being there for you

Ask them how certain are they that they would know?

Ask them how they would discover such a deep secret?

Ask them what clues they would look for when they didn't even know they were supposed to be on such a search?

Ask them if they would like to swallow your poison?



When the bough breaks

When carers hear that their child has been sexually assaulted there are so many feelings, so many questions and so many things said.

The feelings can be : anger, shock, disbelief or confusion.

The questions can be: How could this have happened? When would it have happened? How long has it been going on for? Why didn't I know? Why didn't she tell me?

The things said can be: I don't believe you. This is not true. Why are you lying? Don't say these things to me. You must hate me to say such things. I hate you for saying these things to me.

When the offender is a husband, partner, or trusted relative, the feelings, questions and things said can be more extreme, more lost and more desperate.

The story which often gets lost in the midst of such anguish is the true story of how offenders have controlled people's lives for the fulfilment of their beliefs about the power they possess to be able to sexually assault a child.

Those beliefs concern their right to manipulate and betray anyone in their life or the child's life who may become an obstacle to sexually assaulting a child.

It is not only the “grooming” by the offender which affects this process, but also the response of others who may increase a parent's feelings of guilt and blame for what has happened. The simple phrase, “a mother always knows” carries so many prescriptions about what a good mother should know and should do. Those who see sexual abuse of children as a sexual act rather than a totalising process of mind control, simplistically and wrongfully miss out on the whole story of what this abuse actually involved.

Children also get caught up in those false beliefs and mothers have stated that their children did at different times blame them for not being there, for not knowing, and for not keeping them safe.

Why weren't you there? Why didn't you stop him?

These moments of children trying to understand how this could have happened, often with only the offender's messages to guide them, means that mothers may be the first target of this anger and confusion.

Turning it around

Fundamental to working with children who have been subjected to sexual abuse is the right of non-offending carers to be involved in the healing process, for both their child and themselves. It is imperative that the dynamics of separation and secrecy which operated during the abuse to harm the carer-child relationship are not replicated. For mothers especially, if they see those dynamics occurring it is important to make them transparent and question their credibility. Mothers are entitled to recognition, support, and a place beside their child in coming to terms with the child's telling of the abuse.

Much has been written about the mother's reaction, or lack of reaction when their child discloses sexual abuse. Unfortunately, the greatest expectation is for mothers to be there "for their child" without hesitation, to say and do the right thing to most support their child. For mothers who are unable to fulfil these expectations, there is often an accusation of inappropriate or inadequate responses, statements even assuming that perhaps 'the mother's failings which she now exhibits' may have indirectly caused the abuse to happen in the first place.

These ignorant and judgemental assertions act to further undermine the existing child and carer relationship that has already been damaged by the

offender's actions and intensify the feelings of guilt and self blame that carers are already struggling with. When a child first discloses, it is usually the sexual acts of the abuse that are spoken of. This continues when the child makes a statement to the authorities and also when the child goes to court as a witness. The other story of how the offender set up and continued the assaults by grooming the child and the carer is not given the attention it deserves.

When a child first tells, a mother who carries a very different story about the child and the offender, because of his manipulation of these stories, may find it all the more impossible to believe.

In her study of mothers' reactions to the sexual abuse of their children, Catherine Humphries (1992) describes it as a fluid process that can move from belief to disbelief or not knowing which way to think. The continuing influence of the offender after a child discloses can have a significant effect on whether or not a mother believes that sexual abuse has occurred. An offender rarely admits to his abusive acts and instead, puts a great deal of energy into trying to convince a child's mother that he is indeed innocent and the child is lying. For mothers who have a close relationship with an offender the decision about who to believe is extremely difficult.

Facing the truth of the sexual abuse of her child, a mother then has to reconcile her knowledge and relationship with the offender with the realisation that he abused her child. A mother is forced to acknowledge that her relationship with the offender was one of deceit and betrayal, and in the midst of this horror, she is forced to continue a life often without a partner, father, or brother or other close relationships.

A mother's feelings of anger are initially directed at not only the offender, but herself, as well as her child. A child's disclosure will bring about further family disintegration and a mother is forced to tell the truth of what has occurred to other family members, as well as those close to the child.

Mothers have described this process as akin to running a gauntlet of fire, not knowing where to turn and not trusting if the steps they are taking in trying to escape will ease the pain and deliver peace.

“I know it wasn’t my fault”

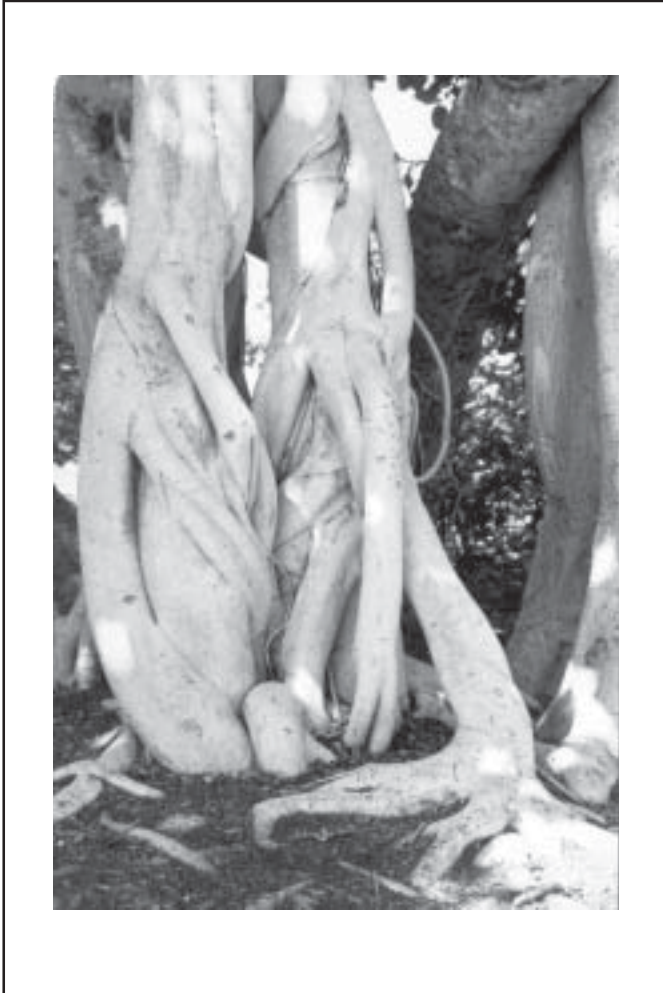
For a mother to form such a belief there is usually a long and painful process of questioning, grief and longing about how things should be, compared to how they have been. If a mother can give herself reprieve from self blame, the journey of recovery, as well her child and family, will be all the more assured.

Mothers have told us that this often untold story of “grooming” must be spoken of again and again if there is to be an untangling of those strong messages of self blame and guilt they carry for the abuse of their child.

The story of “grooming” must be told again and again to take any sense of responsibility and self blame from the child.

The story of “grooming” must be told again and again so people outside the centre of the offender’s actions will understand how this happened and believe it to be true.

The story of “grooming” must be told again and again so it is clear that responsibility and blame stays with the perpetrator of the crime and not those he betrayed.



Some would say

Some would say that children often make up stories and lie about being sexually abused.

Some would say they lie because they are angry or want to get back at their alleged offender.

Some would say they lie to cover up something they have done.

Some would say they have had a dream but think that it's real.

Some would say that they misunderstood what happened - that it was harmless.

Some would say they have fantasies because they have other problems.

Some would say they are attention seeking and feel left out of things.....

.....But children would ask?

If I was a normal child with a normal life how would I know how to make up lies like this?

One of your biggest fears when you tell is getting into trouble. Why would you take that risk if it wasn't true?

Getting angry is not something you would do with someone like this. You would get in more trouble if you got angry. Things would get worse. You know that the only thing you can't do is get angry

Why would you say something that would only make things worse

Dreams are supposed to be about nice things or, at the worst, monsters. How could you have a dream about being sexually assaulted?

How would you know what to dream about if it hadn't already happened to you?

Knowing it was wrong is sometimes hard to work out because he's saying things that tell you it's OK. But the yukky feelings don't go away. Sometimes it hurts and sometimes it doesn't, but it doesn't feel right.

Terrible troubles for the truth

So you tell and he tells and then someone
has to decide who is telling the truth and
who is telling a lie

He can stand there and tell a lie and
laugh at the same time

He can stand there and tell a lie and hug
my mum

He can stand there and tell a lie and cry

He can stand there and tell a lie and pat
my head

He can stand there and tell a lie and then
ask me if he can help me with my problems

He can stand there and tell a lie and says
he has to put the garbage out

He can stand there and tell a lie and ring
his mum for her birthday

He can stand there and tell a lie and say
he'll take us all to McDonalds as a treat

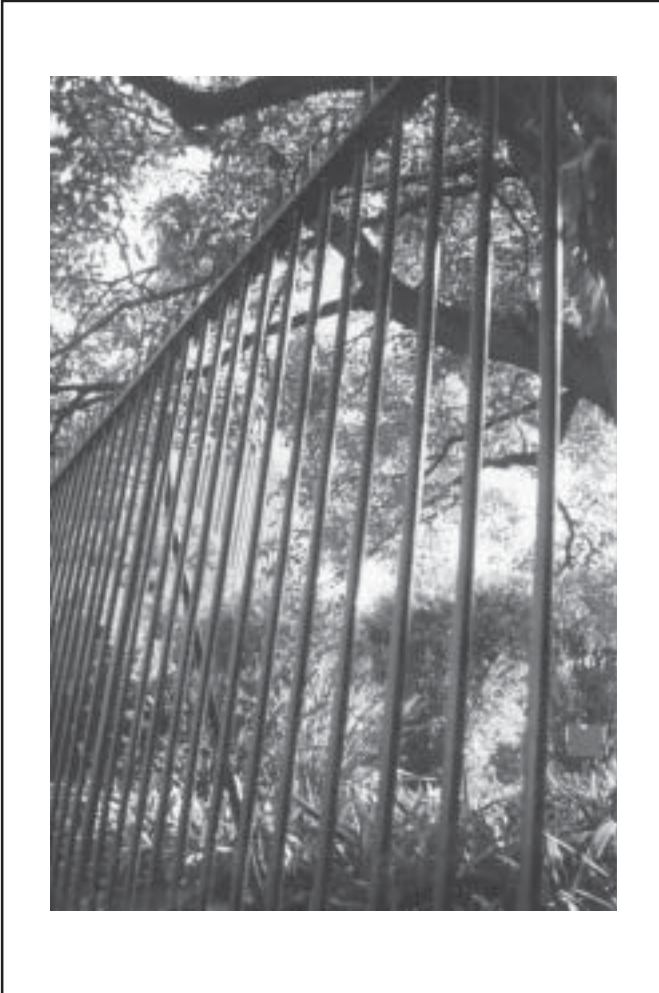
I can stand there and tell the truth and
put my head down

I can stand there and tell the truth and
feel my face go red

I can stand there and tell the truth and
run to my room

I can stand there and tell the truth and
yell bad words at him
I can stand there and tell the truth and
my mouth just mumbles
I can stand there and tell the truth and
laugh because I'm so scared
I can stand there and tell the truth and
then say "forget about it"
I can stand there and tell the truth but
my teddy bear says nothing back to me

Who would you believe?



Left In The Dark

There is so much you feel. All crushed inside and held tightly and you hope that nothing will open any cracks.

Because it all might come rushing out and you need to stay calm all the time for her. She gets so upset when you cry and the anxiety and anger get worse.

You know she blames herself for your distress. She wishes that she hadn't told because it was your family and suddenly you don't have any of them any more.

They took his side and at the time in your life you need their support most you have lost them too. He told her that she had asked for it and wanted it. I know that even though you can tell her that he was tricking her, when she is upset, she really believes that it was her fault and that she should have stopped it from happening.

And then she blames you. He has told her that you knew and didn't mind him touching her - for all those years.

You know that she really can't believe that you didn't know. That's the hardest thing to hear her say - it's your fault. It hurts at the deepest part of you. **Because you will never forgive yourself for not knowing.**

Chasing Wild Geese

It's the last thing you think of to explain why she is so difficult to manage and why she has changed so much. You look for reasons. Is she unhappy at school? Is she being bullied? Is she unwell? Is it early puberty? Are you doing something wrong? Have you yelled at her too much? Aren't you strict enough? Are her friends treating her badly?

And everyone else is busy asking the same questions but they know it must be your parenting and if it was them they would be doing it differently.

And then there's the counsellors you take her to who talk to you of ADD and behaviour modification programmes and parenting skills classes and even notify you to DoCS for emotional abuse - it must be your fault because everyone knows that the mother is always to blame. And he is such a caring father who spends quality time with his daughter and is always so concerned about your emotional instability.

And then when you know that she has been trying to tell you the unthinkable without words, you wonder why you didn't ask the right questions or guess the right answer.

But you know that no one else did either and that any of those other explanations would have been far more reasonable.

You wish it was your parenting or pre-adolescence or problems with friends. And now none of those solutions can ever give relief.

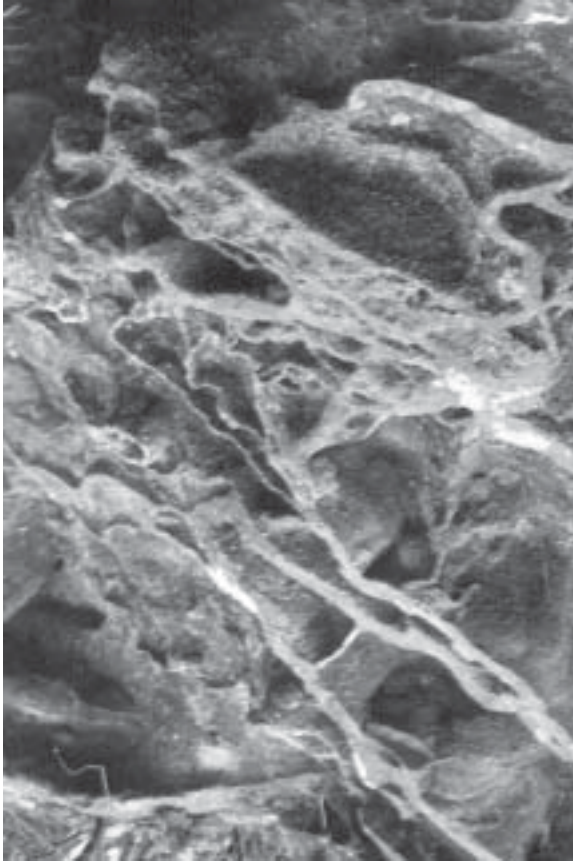
You are faced with meeting this intolerable pain and trying to just be there and understand.



Such a Bad Mother

I should have known.
How could I have been so blind?
She tried to tell me.
Did she ever use the words?
But all that anger
A difficult child they said.
Probably ADD they said
She was my precious angel
But she became a demon
I should discipline her more they said
And I did.
She was making me look like a bad mother
"Into your room"
"Wait till your father gets home"
"Keep this up and you'll be out on the street"
"You are nothing but trouble".
Every word a knife.
I would give my life to take them back and say instead,
"My beautiful child. I am here for you.
He will never hurt you again".

And now all I can say is "Sorry".
"I'm so sorry".



Not Rhyme Nor Reason.....Just a Riddler

The biggest mistake to make when you find out that your child has been sexually assaulted is to try and understand how it could have happened.

You look for answers ... you ask questions to get to those answers but all you get instead is "don't know".

When you get the chance to talk with other mothers who tell stories similar and also different to your own you realise more and more that there is no comprehensible reason for understanding why this has happened to your child.

It happened because the person who assaulted your child wanted to.

Why? Because he did and he knew he would be able to.

Is he sick?

Has he been sexually assaulted and therefore he can't help himself?

Was he confused and not certain of what he was doing?

Did she do something?

Did I do something?

Why did he choose this child and not others?

Have there been others? Is she the first?

Will she be his last victim?

When you can let go of reason and start to look at the answers as one giant riddle with lots of guesses at the answer but no one knowing for sure...the pressure to find out ...to get to the bottom of it will leave you. You know that the only person who may be able to tell you why is the person who did these things.

You know that he will not have the answers you need to hear because he is actually the riddler of the truth. And if you asked him he would only spin more riddles which would only take you further down.

Try to let go of answers to those questions and think of other questions you need to ask instead.

Will she be alright?

Will we ever be able to get over this and get our lives back?

How do you face the morning and the night and then the next morning?

How do you tell her and believe it when you say that everything will be alright?

How do you learn trust again?

How do you learn to believe in yourself again as a parent?

You listen to and learn from those who have gone before you.

To listen to yourself and believe in some of what you say.

You hold on to her tightly and begin the climb .

And leave the riddler in the ditch behind.

Children Tell Us

How can people let a child know that they do believe them no matter what he says or does or what happens next?

When a child tells that someone has sexually assaulted them:

Hear what they are really saying.

Tell them that they have done the right thing because they may not be sure.

Tell them that it's not their fault that this happened and they are not bad and won't be in trouble. This is a really big worry.

Don't get mad or make them feel worse.

When children tell they need to feel better for doing this. When they tell it's a huge load off their shoulders and it needs to stay feeling like that.

When adults get mad or upset it can start to feel heavy again and then they don't want to say any more.

Tell them that you know how hard it was for them to say these things.

Tell them that you know they had to tell as the only way to stop it from happening.

Tell them that they are not alone with this any more. They might start to worry about what will happen now — when he finds out that they have told. They can get heavy with worries and fears and think of all the things that can now happen. Sometimes this feels worse than before they told because they don't know what's going to happen. They can feel afraid again.

Tell them they don't have to do this by themselves and there are people who will keep them safe.

Believe them.



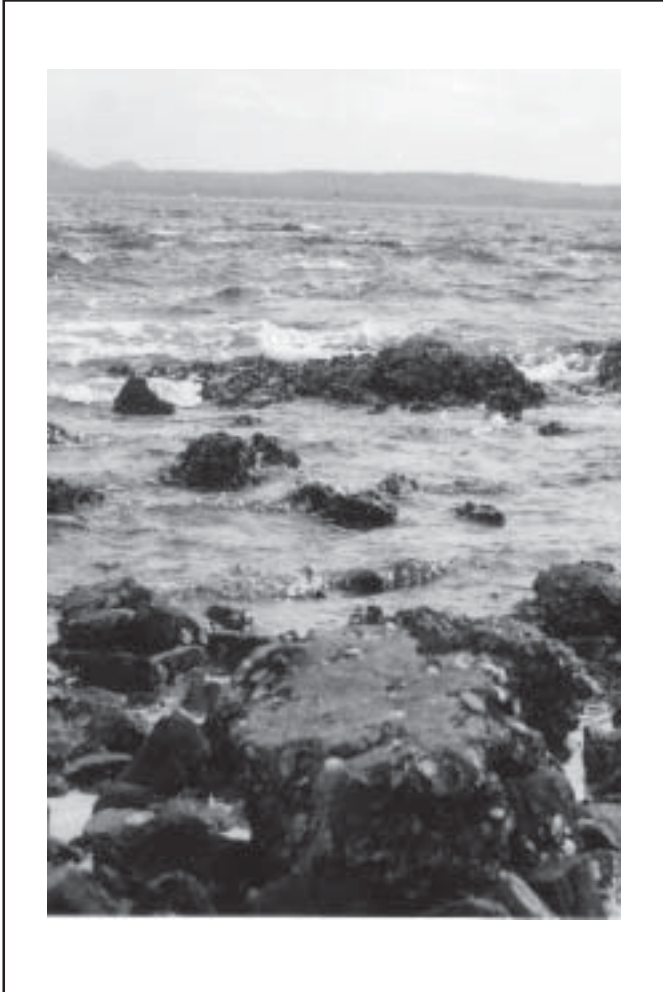
CHAPTER FOUR

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Sounds of silence

My bunny died this morning
I am crying inside because I know it's
because I told
My voice has gone
It just came once when I felt too scared.
He said bad things would happen if I told
That my mum would die and everything
that I loved
I'm sorry I said it
But now it's gone again to keep everything
safe

They don't know that I can't say
They are asking me questions
About truth and lies
I think they are angry
Because I can't speak
They think that I have lied
But my bunny is dead and I am to blame



Stating Your Name and Naming Your Story

Going to the police with a story of sexual abuse is a significant step for children and families as well as for the community.

For families, it signifies the exposure of their lives to public scrutiny, tapping into so many fears about not only possible retribution when the offender is revealed, but also being judged for how such an abhorrent crime could have occurred.

For the community, it sets on record the revelation that child sexual assault still occurs with the profile of an offender once again being someone who had developed a close and trusting relationship with the child they chose to abuse.

When children walk into that room where they will make their statement to the police they carry with them so many confused messages and questions about the abuse and their part in it.

Will they be in trouble? Will they be blamed? Will they have to leave home? Will they be believed? What will happen when the offender finds out they have told? What will he do? What will happen to him now? What will happen to them?

Mothers also hold concerns for the wellbeing of their child as well as the implications for their family once this secret is revealed.

Who will support them? Who will turn against them? What will he do? What will happen to this family now? Will their child be believed? What will happen if they aren't? What will happen if they are?

Families have to deal with the implications of making a complaint of sexual assault to the police, at a time of crisis. Existing trauma is further burdened with the knowledge that criminal charges may be made and the child will be required in the future to confront their offender in court. Making a statement to the police is the turning point in many people's lives where private shock and pain becomes community property. Concerns about possible contamination of evidence or inadvertently giving the suspect warning of what is occurring often means that, until that process is completed, they usually have to carry that burden alone and in silence to those around them.

However, this process may also bring relief for a child, when they are able to share their secret of abuse to believing and supportive police. Children often describe the giving of their statement to the police as a huge weight being lifted from them and mothers speak of the noticeable changes to their child's emotional and physical state.

A Hand to Hold

Even months after, children will recollect accurately the name of the officers who interviewed them , the layout of the room and any important things that were said to them at the time.

For those families where the matter is further investigated by the police, the impact of such action gives them a sense of support and safety that lessens the impact of the trauma they are being forced of cope with. Of course, there are other concerns and the possibility of a criminal case brings with it further pressures. But our consultations with families overwhelmingly state that, no matter what happens in the future, that first point of contact with the police and what transpires at that meeting, has huge implications for them.

After the statement is made a case will proceed further along the legal chain or be closed. That decision is based on the knowledge that proceeding with a criminal case of child sexual assault can be an extremely complex process where the child as the principal witness must satisfy criteria as to their ability to participate as a witness.

If the case does not progress beyond the giving of the child's statement, there may be a significant impact on the family and an overwhelming sense of abandonment by the community.

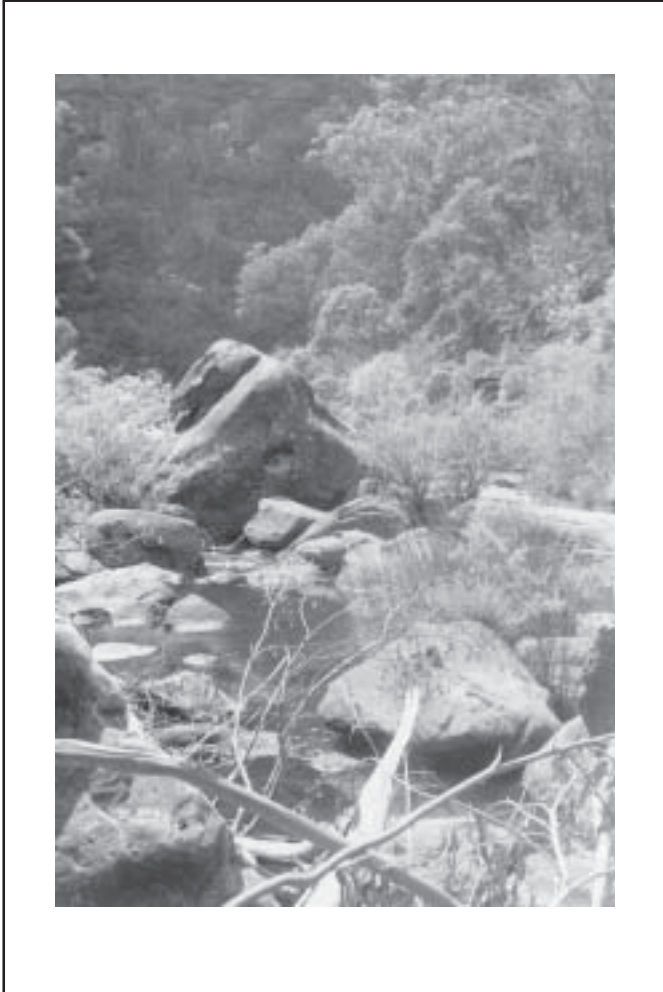
Although reasons are given and acknowledged by the police, the reality is that they may experience many emotions that they must also deal with in their own private place. They face the reality of shattered lives having to be rebuilt, without the acknowledgement that the assaults against their child indeed warranted criminal investigation. The decision not to proceed to court often leaves parents feeling devastated.

Some families who will make the decision not to proceed with further criminal action, are understandably influenced by the intensity of trying to make decisions that would be best for their child. It would seem that having a voice in that decision and allowing reflection returns a sense of empowerment and worth.

In writing these passages we are trying to represent the voices of those families we meet with. We acknowledge the strict legal requirements of police in trying to establish cases that will have legal credibility, faced with the reality that so few cases actually make it to court, and so few result in a criminal conviction. We further acknowledge the positive impact on families by the police who so strongly advocate for their cases to proceed. As families state, police are often the first people they have contact with outside the family and will stay there until that last moment when the court case closes.

It is now clearly recognised that sex offenders will re-offend throughout their lives (Mullens, 1999), relying on their skills of deception to maintain the secrecy of their acts. For every child who does not have their report of abuse investigated and criminally prosecuted, an offender is able to escape responsibility for the crime perpetrated.

The continued high rate of child sexual assault cases which stay outside the criminal justice system reflect two fundamental flaws in the community's response to child sexual assault. First is the lack of willingness to accept that child sexual assault exists in our society to the degree that it does. Latest figures state that, on average, 30 percent of all women and 16 percent of all men have experienced some form of sexual abuse as children (Mullens, 1999). The second major issue is that the system is inherently very difficult for children to access as it is adult-centred and does not generally account for the needs of children as witnesses.



Whispers

Everyone stands around and whispers.
They look at you and then start
whispering again. Sometimes they go out
of the room and then come back and
smile again and ask if you want something
to eat. Then they start whispering again.
They take your mum outside and you hear
them whispering.
She comes in and looks at you and smiles
but she looks sad.
You ask her if she is OK and she says yes
but she still looks sad.
You didn't want to make her sad.
You worry what they have whispered to
her to make her look like this.
Don't they believe you?
Are you now in trouble?
Is it going to happen like he said it would?
They come back in and sit down.
They say that they are going to ask you
some questions.
Your mum has to leave because she isn't
allowed to hear what they ask you.
They talk to you like you're there and
they're looking at you.

And after that they start to tell you what is now going to happen. You know they believe you and they think this is important.

You're scared and worried but you don't worry as much because they are not whispering any more.

They are talking to you like a real person.

So a bit of advice about talking to us kids about things like this. Don't go too fast or say things that we don't understand. Often we don't hear what's being said because we're thinking about other things.

We're still really worried and scared. He could be outside waiting for us or sitting outside our house or going past our school. You tell us we're safe but we don't feel that way yet. So that means we don't always hear what you're saying to us.

A Hand to Hold

But it's hard to say this stuff to people when they're talking to you. You don't want to get in trouble or look stupid because you know this is important and you want to act like you know it is.

But sometimes you will sit and nod or shake your head when they ask you something because you don't know what else to do. Talk like a normal person to us and we might be normal back.

If you knew better about what we were worried about then you might know how we were feeling and then you would talk slower and help us understand things better.

And don't whisper. Just because we're kids doesn't mean we can't hear what you're whispering. Don't you think that when we were being hurt we got to listen for whispers to try and keep us safe.

***It's hard to remember what
you want to forget***

They call you into the room
Your mum can't go with you
She has to wait outside
You want her to come with you
And then you don't
You don't want her to hear what you
have to say
It's better if she stays there
At least I know she's there waiting
for me
When it's over

This is it
There's no turning back
You want to scream and run away
You know that when you say what
you have to say
Things will be different
He will know you've told
Your worst fears will happen

A Hand to Hold

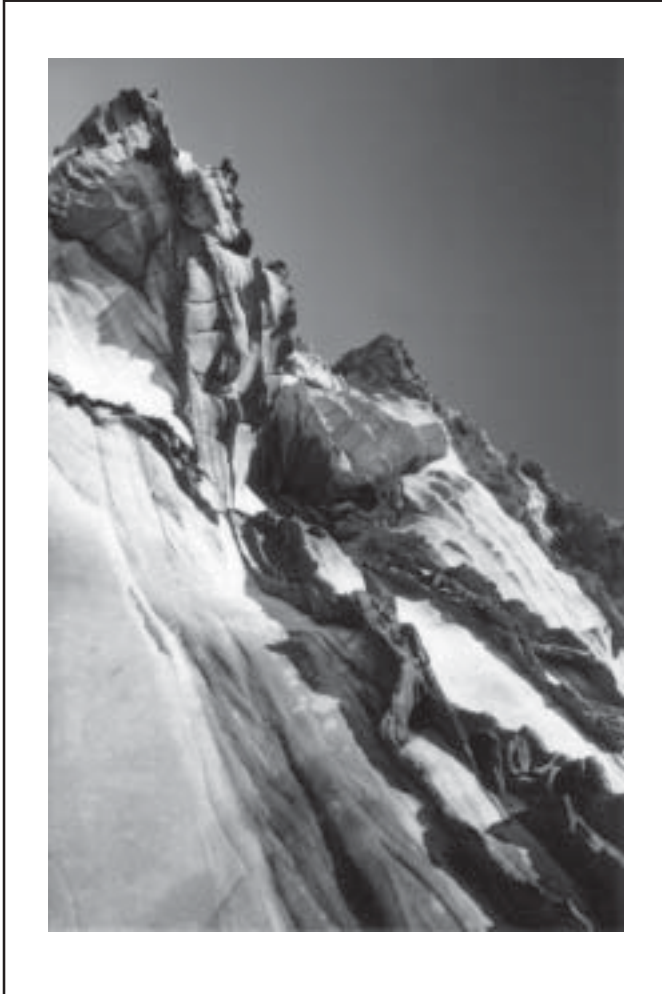
You think about all that could happen
when he knows
And you want to run away
Say nothing happened
Say you don't remember
The policeman asks you to sit down
He says that he is going to ask you some
questions
The lady who was with him has left the
room
She's out there because she is speaking to
him
But she's not in here
Where has she gone?
Why did she have to go?
Why can't she stay?
Even if she doesn't ask you anything
At least you can look at her
You can't look at the man
Because you have to say what happened
You have to say it to him - a man

The questions start
It's OK so far

He's nice and he speaks to you in a
nice way
And then it happens
That first question where you have to
say what happened
You want to run again
You can't look at him
Not while you say those things
There's some butterflies on the wall
Just look at them
He asks again
And I tell
And then he asks more questions
I've already told but I have to tell
again and again
He says he needs to get as much
information as he can
It will save having to perhaps come
back later
I don't want to come back so I answer
the questions

A Hand to Hold

When you first tell someone it's hard
You think about it for a long time
You change your mind again and again
You think of all the things that could
happen
And then something happens and you
know you have to tell
But this telling to the policeman is
different
When you first told no one asked you
what really happened
They might have guessed but they
didn't really know
I only said a little...just enough
But now he's asking me and I have to
say it all
And now it's real
You can't turn back now
So I look at the butterflies on the wall
And I tell



More Than Words Can Say

My mum hugged me
She hugged me when I told
And I knew she believed me
I don't think she knew what to say
But that hug said all I needed
She hugged me before I went into the
room alone
To make my statement
To tell me she was with me
I took that hug with me
And now when my secret has been
cracked open
For all the world to see
And fear seeps through to my soul
She hugs me with pride and sadness and
knowledge of my pain
And love to hold me through anything.

My Mum

My mum sits close to me
Her arms hold me tight
My mum just knows
That I'm scared,
I don't want to be here
It's picnic day at school today
My friends don't know I am here
Or what has happened
I don't want to say the bad stuff
Not even to my mum

The man comes to talk to me
I have to follow him to a room
There is a lady too
But you want me to talk to a man
My tummy feels sick
I want my mum
She gets up to come with me
But I need my mum
To make me feel safe
I'm so scared with that man
I'm alone and so scared
To say things that are bad.

One Small Voice

They talk of courage
But this is beyond all words
A tiny child breaking through chains of fear
To search out freedom
She walks from me into the room
A police officer by her side
But without a hand to hold
She looks back at me
Eyes pleading for me to go with her
And my heart aches at her aloneness.

Hurt that has found words
When words had known nothing but childhood
Of favourite toys and picnics in the park
She has met monsters in her dark
Tearing at her mind and body
Fear has captured her well
And accompanies her now to tell
Of how and when and where.

I have heard her truth and know
Only her voice can now keep her safe
The secret must be shared
Not just for her and me
To fight her demons.
Her moment of lonely fear
And a small voice of truth
Will change our life.



Tick Tock

She went into the room with the two police officers and the door shut behind them.

I was left alone in the room.

I watched the door for ages and then thought I had better do something or else I won't breathe.

I took out the magazine I had brought with me. Just in case it would be a while.

They said it would be a while.

I didn't know a while lasted so long.

I so wanted to be with her but I wasn't allowed.

I was told the reason and I thought this makes sense

But it didn't make sense to be not with her at this time.

I had left her alone again.

I didn't want her to feel alone ever again

And now she was .

The clock ticked silently but it was my only company.

Each time the hands moved I would say to myself

"She must almost be finished."

I must have said that ten times...maybe

twenty..maybe one hundred.

"It must almost be finished."

How would she be going?

What is she saying? What are they saying to her?

The magazine should be telling me what to do.

But it's telling me how to make my hair look
different and what tasty dish to cook for tea and
what's happening to what's his face in Hollywood
But it doesn't tell me about what to do now
Someone should be telling me what to do now
because I don't know what to do.
Is that all I can do now?
Watch a stupid clock?
And what do I do when she comes out of that
room? Do I ask or do I wait for them to tell me what
to do? Here comes that panicky feeling again.
I want to knock on the door.
Do they know I'm still out here waiting or do they
think I have gone?
Of course they know I am here.
Where else would I be?
So why doesn't the door open?
Why is she still in there?
My head is talking to the rest of me because no one
else will.
Stay calm....breathe...it will soon be
over...everything will be OK
Please open that door.

Betrayal

Sick fear
Head spinning
Screaming "bad bad girl"
The words have escaped
Can't be taken back
Locked in for so long
And now out
A voice that doesn't sound like mine
Says it all
He knows I am here
Telling secrets
I feel his eyes watching me
His face hard
Knowing I must now be punished.
Fear takes over me
I walk from that room
Into the unknown darkness of what will
happen now.



Times and places

I was 5
I was 6
I was 7
I was 8
I was 9
I was 10

He hurt me in the cubby
He hurt me in the shed
He hurt me in the bedroom
He hurt me in the bathroom
He hurt me under the house

He assaulted one of us
He assaulted two of us
He assaulted three of us
He assaulted four of us
He assaulted five of us

But we stayed silent
The cost of telling was too great
He drew pictures of killing my mum
He drew pictures of killing my dad
He did kill my dog

He followed me wherever I went
To remind me of his power over me
If I rode my horse he was behind me on
his bike
If I locked my door he found a way to
open it
If I played with friends he was there to
join our games

He was part of the family
My dad called him "mate"
My mum gave him hugs
He was happy to baby-sit
He needed our love and support!

And now you ask me the times and the
places
Of that hurt in my life!
What I was wearing
When did it happen
Where we were
I can say every day
But that is not enough

So there's nothing that can be done?

Empty Promise

When they say there is not enough evidence to
proceed
Her world crashes down
It feels as if they haven't believed her or you
And you know he will use that to prove to
everyone she was lying

They didn't ask her to tell her story
They just asked questions about times and
places
She couldn't say exactly because it happened all
the time
Every time he could get her alone for all those
years
She is so angry
She won't talk to me
She is screaming and kicking everything all the way
home
It had taken so long for her to have the courage
to tell me
And I promised that if she told the police
They would stop him hurting anyone else
He still has ways to have contact with other
children
She has been so worried about all the other
children

And now there is nothing we can do to stop him.
You know you haven't done enough
Even though there is nothing more you can do
And once more you have let her down
And your promises prove that
You can't manage to reclaim
Your place as a proper mother
Why should she trust you or anyone else?

A Timely Reminder

She could remember so much
She could remember where she was
She could remember where I was
She could remember what the weather was like
She could remember what she was wearing
She could remember what he said
She could remember what he did
She could remember what she did after it
happened
She could remember what I did when she told me

But she couldn't remember the date or the time
And I remember my face and her face and his face
when
Nothing more could be done.

What do you think?

Do you think I'm a liar?
Can't you use this tape?
Don't you know how many more he can
hurt?
Don't you know how hard this has been to
tell you?

I walk from that room
And everything has fallen
At 12 I tried to open those secrets that
had been so long in my childhood
And you say there is nothing more you can
do.
I am hurt and angry and scared again
inside
As you quietly close the door behind me.

Moment of Truth

She sits silent, waiting
Wanting the moment to go
Flashes of terror
Her hand grips mine, hot, sweating, trembling
Tremors of fear through my body
They speak of statements, truth, convictions
The law and cross examinations

She giggles, baby talk
Has disappeared into another place
And I make the easiest and hardest decision
To keep her safe from further harm
It is over
There can be no charge, no court, no
conviction.
He will stay free
But so must she



All For The Best

If I could eat words
I would
Every bad, disgusting, dirty one
They told me I had done the right thing
And been very brave
But it's not true
I was stupid and wrong to tell
And I am very sorry
Everything is written on that paper
And recorded on that tape
Forever
To make it all better

But now my mum cries every day
She is sad and very angry
I think it is with me
My dad has left and it is my fault
My sister says I am a liar
And yells at me and won't play
Nan and Pop won't talk to us
And don't send birthday presents any
more
And soon we have to move house

My dad was very angry
And looked at me with those
disappointed, cruel eyes
I am so scared every night
Because he said he would come in my
window
When I was asleep
And take me away
If I told
So I try not to sleep
But if my dad goes to gaol,
I will be punished forever and go to hell

I am scared and I am angry
And I wish I could rip that paper
And stamp all over that tape
And make everything stop hurting

Making A Difference

Everything changed after making my statement

The policewoman and DoCS worker were really nice

I really like the police officer - she was heaps cool

She gave out strength -

"We're going to get this guy"

"We're behind you" kind of thing

I was so lucky to have her

You felt it wasn't just a job

She did it because she felt strongly about it

The interview took about three hours.

It was really hard because they had to know everything

That was the first time I'd really cried since it happened

Going through the detail was really hard.

But now I felt I was believed and wasn't alone

The law was with me

It gave me strength and I felt the heaviness begin to lift.

Paper In My Pocket

I had this piece of paper that I carried in my pocket.

The police gave it to me after I told them what had happened.

They called it an AVO

They said that this meant that the person who sexually assaulted me couldn't come near me

I carried this everywhere...to school..to the shops..to a friend's house

I felt safer because I knew that if I saw the person who hurt me I could ring the police

This piece of paper told me that the police believed me

This piece of paper told me that they thought this man should not be allowed to come near me

I knew that the person who abused me had been told by the police that he had to leave me alone

He knew that the police knew what he had done

And I had it in writing on a piece of paper.

Decision Makers

They say to you that you need to make a decision about whether or not you want your child to make a statement, to have a medical, to go to court and give details of their abuse in their evidence.

They say to you that they will try and support whatever decision you make although they may advise you that it is worthwhile or futile.

They may ask you to consider that your child is too old or too young, too clear or too vague.

They say to you that going to court is a difficult process and you need to be aware of all the implications that has for your child.

They say to you that they can't say whether or not a conviction is likely. The judge or jury will make that decision.

If we want to talk about decision-makers let's talk about the one person who made all the decisions.

Let's talk about the person who decided to abuse my child, to tell lies and make promises that were all to be broken.

Let's talk about the person who decided that whatever it took they had to keep their act of violence a secret so that even when the truth finally escaped they decided to maintain their lies.

Let's talk about that decision maker who escapes prosecution and then decides to continue his abusive acts against yet another child so that yet another parent is forced to become the next reluctant decision maker.

But as the reluctant decision maker I decide that I will do whatever it takes to make this person answerable for his criminal decisions. I never ever want to hear that he has abused another child or for another child or parent to feel this way.

I decide that this is going to end.

Here's the thing,

None of this was ever our decision.

As a parent you want to make decisions about what to put on their sandwiches, whether they should do two sports or one, whether to continue with the dance class or let them take on the piano, if they should drop Jenny as a friend, if they should wear a jumper to school in case it turns cold, stand for class captain, ride that bike down the hill they're always talking about, what movie to take them to in the holidays, when that next dentist appointment is and what shampoo they should be using.

I never wanted decisions about the sexual abuse of my child to be mine.



CHAPTER FIVE

WHILE YOU WAIT

Outsiders

I often feel like I'm on the outside looking in.
But I can't see over the window sill.
To get a good view of what's happening inside.
This is about her and the assault
But I feel like it's happening to someone else
And is about someone else.

Since they charged him they seem to have
forgotten that we exist. It's not our story any
more.
It's their case and I know they're busy.
But our lives are falling apart
And they seem to have forgotten about that.
Not that they can do anything.
But what a difference a phone call would make.

I wish they knew what a difference it could make
Just to have a phone call to tell us what happened
at the court without us today.
All day she has been ready to cry about the
smallest thing.
Every time the phone rings she jumps and looks
worried. I'm not sure what it was even about today.
Just that we didn't have to go.
It was for a mention but I'm not sure what that
means. She thinks it's about the judge deciding
Whether she has told the truth or not.



Momentous Times

It does a great disservice to children and families who have been subjected to sexual assault to assume that after such crimes have been exposed, they will begin their recovery.

It is often believed that the child's behaviours which may have signalled that something was wrong will subside, the relationships that have been torn apart will eventually be mended, and the avalanche of emotions that have been propelled into the arena of a family's life, will find a resting place.

Sexual assault is not only a criminal act but also an experience of immeasurable trauma for those subjected to it. As such, it naturally takes time, joined by courage and fortitude, to enable families to deal with what has happened in their lives and seek escape from its hold on them.

Reporting the sexual assault of a child to the authorities may bring relief but may also unleash fears, behaviours, and changes in a family's existence that need to be confronted and dealt with on a daily or even hourly basis.

The criminal justice system needs evidence that the acts of sexual assault, as stated by a child, have indeed occurred. But the dynamics of sexual abuse are so much more than the specific incidents of where and when the assaults took place. The totality of control a perpetrator employs to maintain the assault extends into every aspect of that child's and family's existence. Everything that has been assumed as fact and truth prior to the reporting of sexual assault is suddenly eroded. Families must begin a process of gathering the pieces together, from the debris that remains, and redefining their lives and themselves.

While the necessary process of the law meanders along its path, families are caught in a time tunnel that keeps their lives on hold. They're past that first point of entry with the telling of the sexual assault, but now, often months after that crisis, they are still a long way from the point of closure from the legal system. They cannot yet be given a more private space to work through their grief and attempt to reclaim ownership of their lives. It is imperative to families caught up in that tunnel of time that the burden of that waiting be acknowledged.



No News Is Never Good News

“When we have some news we’ll let you know”.

You wait for the phone calls that bring the news but they never come.

You ring and they say there is no further news.

You wait a few more days and then you ring again -nothing has happened.

They say they will be in touch when they hear something.

You wait and they have not been in touch.

You start talking to yourself and the phone, asking it to please ring and please let it be some news.

People in your family and close friends ask if you have heard anything and you say there is no news.

Your child seems to be getting through the days without the same waiting as you and then sometimes she lets it slip that she has also been waiting to hear.

You tell yourself that there is no point them ringing you if there is no news to tell you.

You tell yourself that they are busy with so many cases and don’t need to be always bothered by your phone calls just to tell you there is no news.

But somehow ringing them keeps it real for you.

No, they haven’t forgotten you.

A Hand to Hold

No, the case is still going ahead.

No, as far as they know the accused is still living in the same place.

But no, there is no more news.

You start to tell yourself that if you worked there, you would ring a mother every day, even if just to say there is no news.

Other people tell you to be patient and wait till you hear something.

To not bother them.

You think the days waiting are unbearable and then the days become weeks and months.

You try to behave and get busy doing other things

To get your mind off it.

And then it happens.

You walk past the phone and you ring -

Just in case there's news.

The Sad Patch

You try to pretend that it's all over
You get busy at school
You go back to dancing lessons
Your mum lets you have friends over for a
sleep over
You fight with your younger brother
You get your room to look different
You go shopping with your mum and buy
something nice

**But then something happens to re-
mind you that you still have to go to
court and talk about what happened
and**

You feel it again
That sad patch that sits close to your
heart.
It sort of aches when you remember that
it's not over
Sometimes it aches so much you think
your going to have a heart attack
If your sad patch got bigger maybe you
would die
Sometimes you feel like crying because
you're so scared
It's like your sad patch is crying inside
even though you're not on the outside
You think if you got real sick or ran away,
just for a while

A Hand to Hold

Then maybe you wouldn't have to go
to court
Maybe you wouldn't have to talk
about what happened
But you know that it's too late now
You said you would go to court and
you can't change your mind.
You don't want to change your mind
really
But you just want it to be over
And then the sad patch might go
away

Paper Mache

When I read my child's statement and then my own it seemed as though there was a whole other story that had not been told. I understand that the criminal system is about evidence and proof beyond reasonable doubt. I understand that the evidence is about what happened, at what time, at which address, where everyone was at the time, what people were wearing, what was said, what happened next. But if you crumble those pieces of paper up they are so small compared to the rest of the story.

Outside the statements of evidence are statements of shock, initial disbelief and tremendous rage that someone you trusted, your child trusted, chose to abuse that trust.

The person who raped my child was the person I was going to spend my life with. He was my friend, husband, confidante, and father to my children. He was the person I had told my deepest secrets to and in whose hands I delivered my children because I thought him a decent man.

And when you discover his failure at decency you feel scared and suspicious of everyone around you. You start to build a fortress around yourself and your children. They can't go out, you will take them to school, they can't have friends over and they can't go to their best friend's house, they can't go to the shops and they can't stay home alone.

They can't play out the front and they can't play out the back but they can't stay inside in case the phone rings. She might be able to stay at their aunt's house but will she be safe there. Are the other people in her life safe? You thought that he was safe and yet he wasn't. So who is safe?

What will help make you feel this safety again? You are willing to do anything to have him be answerable for his crime, so you agree for your child to make a statement to the police and reveal the brutality of what happened to her. It needs to be clear and precise and after several hours they tell you they have finished. Then there is nothing from them for weeks and you wait, wondering what has happened. Have they believed her? Have they believed you?

You then hear that he is going to be charged. You might hear that there is "insufficient evidence" and nothing further will happen. You may have your first day at court and be told that the court is overloaded and it is unlikely that the case will start. Don't they know how you have agonised for this day to come? You learn that there will be other days to follow and all you have is to wait.

While you wait you continue to maintain your fortress.

You notice your child has started to build their own, to change their looks, their behaviour, their interests...anything that makes them a different person from the one who had been abused.

You hear that he is "still around" and you might see him in the area so you change your habits more. You travel twice the distance so you don't risk seeing him. You change your phone number and cut contact with "joint friends", even family. You see him in the distance while you're out and you run and hide. You stay in the toilets at the shopping centre hoping he has gone and then you come out and gingerly proceed. You have forgotten why you were now at the shops or you feel too tired to continue so you go home to your fortress and take refuge from the world that he has invaded.

So this story, if it was written as a statement of truth would be so immense that there would never be enough pages. All that can be done with this story is to acknowledge it, tear it up and remould another story that is without the presence and pain of an offender as its benefactor. This new story is about finding new truths, reestablishing relationships with the people who matter, finding ways every day to try and open up the fortress, to rediscover trust, to rediscover laughter, to move on together, and to celebrate in proud jubilation.

Like Clockwork: wake up calls.... Daily routines...night alarms

This used to be my day. Wake up... get the kids to school... do what I had to do while they were gone...get them tea and get them ready for bed...and then sleep. It was always hectic but sort of ordered. I knew where they were and where I was and what had to be done.

Since sexual assault has invaded our lives, my clockwork routine no longer exists. I no longer wake because sleep is so difficult to rediscover. When I do wake there are little hands that hold on to me and arms wrapped about me because my child has also found that peaceful sleep is no longer part of their life.

Going through the day to day tasks feels like walking in a dreamlike state. You're there and doing things and making conversations and trying to normalise everything but nothing feels normal. What once were reflex tasks like eating and cleaning and shopping and meeting with the neighbour and answering the phone seem so difficult to achieve. You wait for rest but it doesn't come. Night is no longer a place that offers that rest. It offers instead checking the windows and doors several times, staying by your child hoping that it will only take a moment to let go of their fear, fighting with them for them to sleep and not be afraid because you are there and nothing can happen.

But then you remember that something has happened to them and you realise that your promise seems so empty.

So you become a guardian of the night. Staying up until they seem asleep, whether that is on the lounge or beside their bed or your bed. You hold their hand and stroke their hair and then capture that moment because you believe they are at peace. You move away but your move wakes them again and they again reach out for you. So you sit with them and hold onto them and wait for the peace to come. When it filters through you take a moment for yourself but that is often to feel the emotion that you are trying to hide from your child. So you run that gauntlet until you are depleted and then the morning comes.

And you move on because people want you to fulfil your duties as the parent of a child who has been assaulted. And this is a whole other clock to run by: counselling sessions, medical appointments, police appointments, school appointments, family meetings, things to read, decisions to make... "Yes"..."no"..."I don't know"..."What do you think?"... Someone says to you, "As your child's parents you need to think about her best interests" and I want to scream at them, "That's all I think about".

Going the Wrong Way

S he was so angry
E very time she spoke or looked at me
E very time I said to her that I was here for her
E very time I went close to her

S he said she wasn't angry with me
But I knew she was.
I blamed myself for not knowing
For not keeping her safe
For her not being able to tell me sooner
I knew that she should be angry with me
I was angry with me

But I didn't know why until she told me of her
anger
S he was angry with me because I was the
reason she didn't tell.
He said he would hurt me...kill me
He said she would never see me again
If it hadn't been for me she could have told
If she hadn't worried about what would happen
to me
S he could have told
S he was angry with me because I was going to
be his next victim

Bad Company

She always hangs around the girls that you
think are the bad kids
She's started smoking and truanting and she's
still in primary school
There is a group of kids I know she would like
They're really nice and fun and like the same
things that she does
I ask her why she isn't friends with them
And she says that she isn't good enough for
them
That she hasn't got her virginity and that
makes her not a good person any more
"They wouldn't want to be with me" she says
I feel so sad because no-one can ever give
that back to her.

Noiseworks

S he seems so noisy now.
Not quiet...not gentle.
Before you sometimes wouldn't know she was
even home.
S he would creep around. S he could be in the
same room and you wouldn't even know it.
But now there's lots of noise. E verything has a
noise.
Moving chairs... walking... playing music..
Getting something to eat.
Playing with friends..doing homework..saying what
she wants and thinks.
Sometimes the noise is the hardest to handle
It's rough and loud and sometimes angry and
demanding and "right away"

It's unfair and selfish and no one else counts
noise. But if you think about this noise maybe it's
saying other things.

*It's saying I can yell and nothing really bad will
happen. It's saying I can say what I want and no
one will hurt me later*

*It's saying take notice of me because I don't have
to hide away any more.*

*It's saying I can get upset and worried and angry
and everyone is going to know about it.*

*It's saying there are no more secrets and I don't
have to stay invisible any longer.*

*It's saying I can make any sound I want to and no
one will ever silence my noise again.*

And maybe when she learns to trust these sayings
she will be able to let her noise not protest so
loudly about what was taken from her.

Me and My Shadow

It follows me everywhere
It sometimes sits on the back of my neck
Sometimes it is in my stomach or my
throat
It can give me a big headache
It can make me feel sick.
It's like someone is sticking pins in my
heart
It's like tongue my has gone all the way
down to my stomach and I can't swallow
It sits most of the time as a tiny dot close
to my heart
I know it's there..sometimes more than
other times
When I'm with friends or listening to
music or watching a good movie or playing
with my dog in the backyard it seems to
be gone
But other times when is it quiet or I am
alone in my bed or wake up early in the
morning or hear the doorbell ring or hear
the phone the shadow gets bigger
It's there to remind me that I still can't
get away from having been sexually
assaulted. It's there to remind me that
court hasn't even happened and there
could be months to wait
It's there to remind me that he's out
there knowing that I told

It's there to remind me of how scared I
feel
I know it will stay there until all of this is
over
Until court comes and goes
Until I know that I don't have to tell
again what he did to me
I hope that this shadow will go away
It will get sick of being there inside me
and will go far away
Like him. I hope he goes far away and
takes my shadow.

A Shadow of Their Real Self

But shadows can't run in the park can't
ride a bike down that big hill in our street

Can't eat ice cream or drink chocolate
milkshakes

Can't enjoy the sun or feel a hot water
bottle on a cold night

Can't invite friends over

Or be asked to a party

Can't get a prize on assembly or read a
book

Can't play a game of netball or soccer or
dance or sing in the school choir

Shadows are both very real because they
feel so real but then they're not real at all

Shadows are just that...shadows of what
is real...just like him

Just a shadow of what a real person
should be like.



Now and Then

You look at old photographs and you see the past before you.

When they are born you want them to take on the world.

You instill in them values and beliefs about the wonderment of what lies ahead for them.

You watch their struggles and their successes from their first steps at walking to their first steps to school.

You have your own struggles with them and you pass through so many shades of emotion from exasperation, anger and hurt to great joy and love. And you know that peace at night when you watch them from their door and take a breath with that view.

You fight with them about getting off the phone, eating their dinner, tidying their room, not answering back, getting up for school.

You fight for them when their siblings pick a fight, when they struggle with that homework sheet, and when their best friend drops them.

You joke with them about their weird haircut, the daily "guess what" that happened in the playground at school and the latest movie they've seen.

Sometimes you have even joked about monsters under their bed or the “bogeyman” who comes to their window at night. And then the joke becomes a real monster and a real bogeyman and you have lost your self-assurance that the world has been a safe place for your child.

Your eyes are forced to look at something that was never meant to be in your child’s world. Your eyes are forced to look at the face of your child and see the difference from her past photographs.

Your voice fails to know what to say and you sit in silence because that is all that is left.

How you find your voice is perhaps your first task as a parent. You need it to say something and all it can say is that you believe them and ask them for forgiveness because you were not able to keep your lifelong promise that you would always be there for them and keep them safe.

You ask yourself if they truly look different or is that the way you see them. A time when you know they were fine and a time when the hurting started. You look at the photographs and you can pick that time.

A Hand to Hold

There is one photo...one face in time when you
know their face is no longer theirs.

This can tell you so much the story of what
happened to them.

But when you think of your own photo albums and
the stories in them

You know that there are so many stories to come.

There are so many photo albums to follow.

And so many destinations that are yet to be
discovered.

You hold on for those new photo images.

You have passed the "then". You are coping
with the "now".

You hold on for the "when".

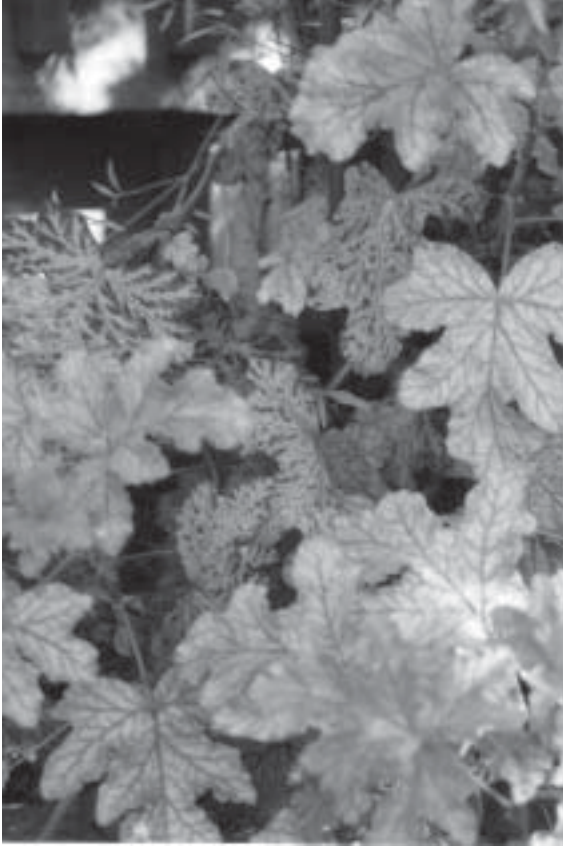
Like A Slap In The Face

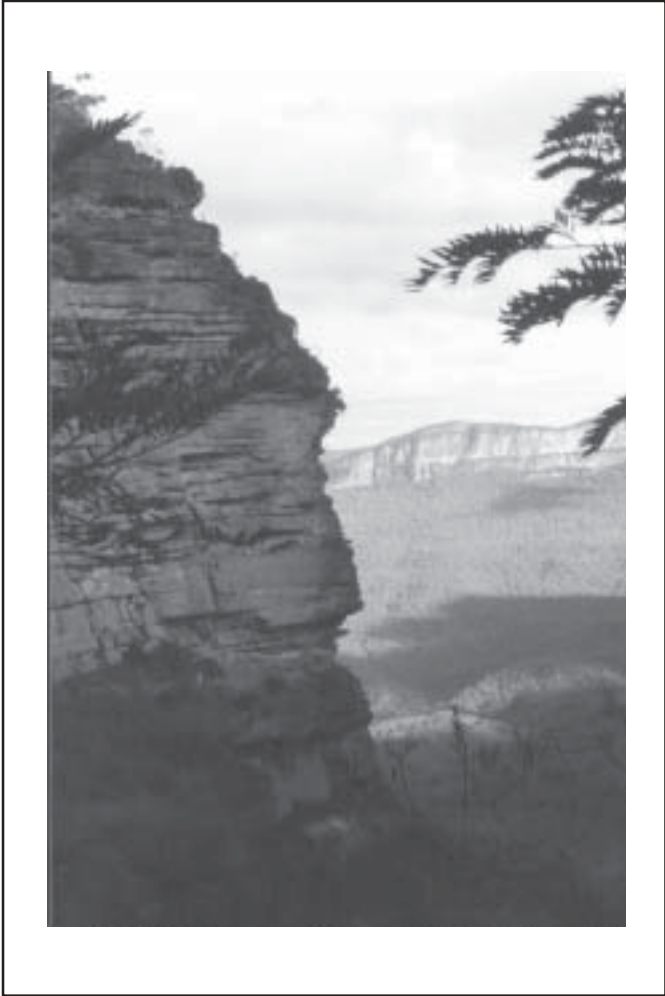
Isn't it about time you got over this?
Are you still going on about this stuff?
Forget about it.
You're always in a mood.
You've got a real chip on your shoulder.
It's not doing her any good staying in the past.
Have you thought about changing your hairstyle?
You're not the same any more.
I don't think I know who you are any more.
You need to get a new interest.
S hhh! Let's talk about something more cheerful.
You look dreadful. What's wrong with you?
You're never happy.
You have a real problem.
Get over it.
Pull yourself together.
If you can't talk about anything else then don't
talk at all.

And you wonder why?

It Gets A Bit Mixed Up

I told my teacher and then she told someone and then they came and spoke to me at school and then my mum came up and then I had to go to the hospital and then they said my mum could take me home and then I had to go back to the hospital and then I had the police come and see me again and then I started seeing a lady who said she wasn't from the police or the hospital and then I had to go to the dentist and I didn't know why I had to go to the dentist when I had already been to the hospital two times and then my mum said that I just needed to see the dentist because she had made this time before all this had happened and she knew I needed to go because of this hole in my tooth.





PART TWO

SEARCHING FOR JUSTICE

Wrong and Right

They told me that I didn't have to go
to court if I didn't want to
The police told me that he probably
wouldn't be found guilty
But I knew it was important because
he had done a really wrong thing and I
needed to tell people
I still wanted to try
It would be wrong not to do that



TRUE COLOURS

Black and White

An overview of the justice system seemingly illustrates a series of steps and rules indicating a straightforward path from the moment a complaint is made until the delivery of a verdict.

In the state of New South Wales, any allegation of child sexual assault must be reported to the Department of Community Services. Upon receiving the report of suspected child sexual assault, a case is assessed and may be allocated for further investigation depending on the information received.

The Department of Community Services and the NSW Police Service work together as the Joint Investigation Response Team (JIRT) to investigate any reports of child sexual assault and gain evidence which may result in criminal action being taken.

They take a statement from the child and other witnesses. Other witnesses can include people who the child first disclosed to or people who may have heard or seen something that corroborates the child's evidence. This may include obtaining medical evidence.

The police will usually question the person against whom the allegations have been made. Once the police believe they have enough evidence that person (the suspect) will be charged. If it is believed there is insufficient evidence the matter will not proceed.

The police will decide whether to release him on bail or hold him in custody until the case gets to court for the first time. If released on bail, the accused will have to abide by certain undertakings including staying away from the victim and agreeing to attend court when required.

Children and family members who fear for their safety may gain an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) which seeks to protect them from further violence or the threat of violence.

The case is then referred to the Department of Public Prosecutions for legal prosecution. If at that time they believe there is not enough evidence to gain a conviction, the matter will be “no billed” and the case will not go to court.

The first time the accused attends court is at a Local Court and is called a mention. Victims do not usually have to attend this court hearing. At the mention, dates are set for future court hearings and the conditions of bail are reviewed.

If the accused pleads not guilty to the charges there must be a committal hearing at a local court. The court is presided over by a Magistrate who will decide if there is sufficient evidence to proceed to trial. Increasingly, paper committals are held where statements are handed to the Magistrate without the need for witnesses to give evidence in person.

The trial is held either at the Local or District Court. The Local Court is presided over by a Magistrate who hears the evidence and makes the judgement. At the District Court the trial is presided over by a judge. A jury will hear all the evidence to determine if someone is guilty or not guilty of the alleged crime.

If found 'not guilty', the matter is closed and the accused is free to leave. If found 'guilty', a sentence will later be passed down by the Judge.

Shades Of Grey

When an allegation of sexual assault is made by a child, families entrust that matter to the legal hands of the community in blind faith that justice will be found.

The enormity of this step cannot be underestimated. It defies the strongly demanded order by an offender that his actions remain a secret. The fears and shame held by children and supportive family members now becomes the property of the community. When they take that step by making a statement they are delivering those deeply private matters into public hands. And it is at this point in time that they lose almost all entitlement to what will eventuate from their allegations.

The cogs of the legal system set in motion a slowly churning “machine” that may take months, even years, to complete this search for justice. There are always changing circumstances with bargaining and deliberations altering the flow of what will occur. Court delays, changes of plea, the inadmissibility of certain evidence, difficulties with uncorroborated evidence, the testing of a witness’s credibility, and the make-up of a jury with their own beliefs and prejudices can all influence the way a case will proceed.

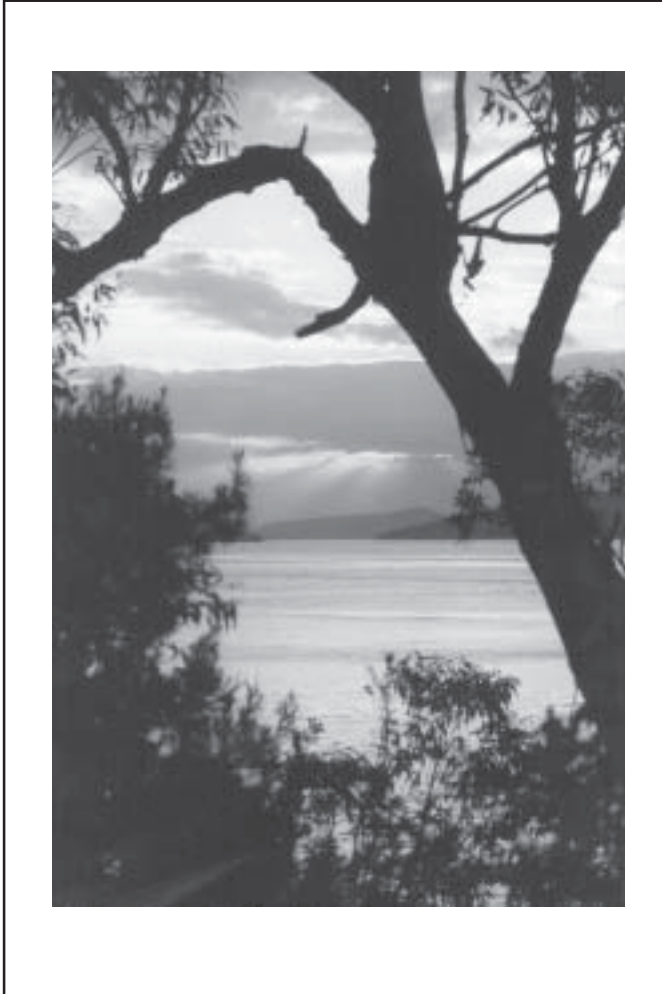
At it’s most devastating, the “machine” may never start with cases disqualified soon after a child’s statement is made.

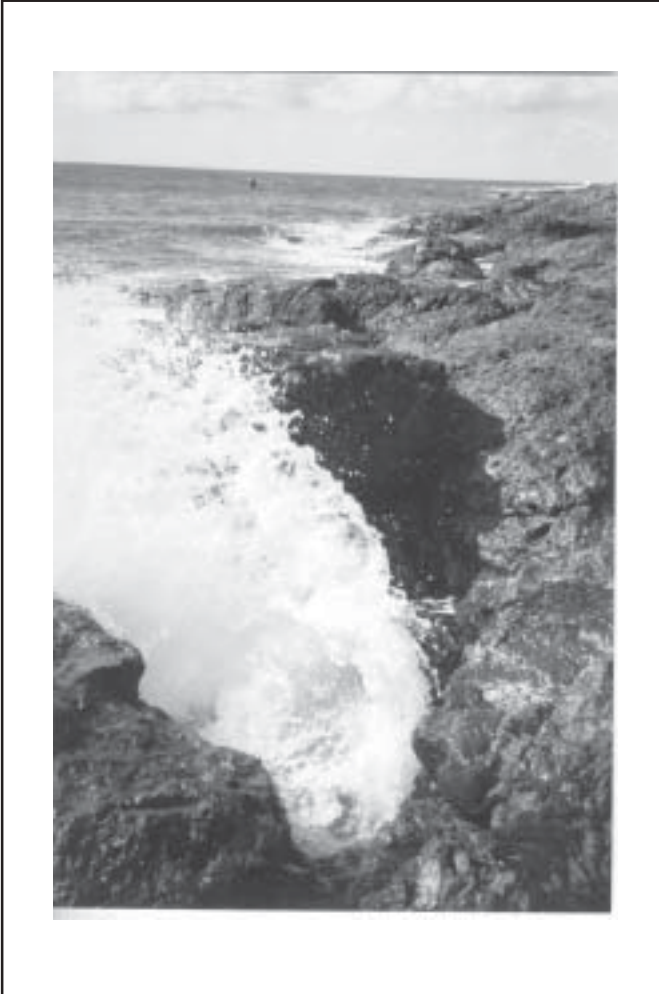
Our justice system maintains that an accused person is innocent until proven guilty, the idea being that if two sides argue against each other, and provide evidence to support their facts, truth will eventually prevail.

In the prosecuting of child sexual assault, the difference of opinion about the facts that occurs between two sides falls heavily on the child witness. The secret nature of sexual assault itself usually excludes other witnesses and a child is left with the lone task of giving sufficient evidence, both when making their statement to the police and as a court witness, to prove beyond reasonable doubt that the adult they have accused of a crime, is telling lies about his innocence. The secrecy surrounding his crime and the isolation of his victim from others usually excludes corroborating evidence.

Statistically, the successful prosecution of child sexual assault cases is quite low. In 1997, 65 percent of all offenders in New South Wales District Court trials were convicted (Judicial Commission NSW, 1997). In this system of truth and justice, a child is required to verbalise exact details of the crimes committed against them, and in the face of prodding words from adult linguists.

The Achilles Heel to this legal system of truth and justice is that children and families continue, if given the opportunity, to take on the odds against them, and maintain the search for their own truth to be acknowledged and some sense of justice to be found.





CHAPTER SIX

CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

***The Whole Truth and Nothing
but.....***

If they tell you to tell the truth in
court

And you do

And then he tells lies about what
happened

How come they believe the lies

And don't believe the truth?

You can explain to your child the reasons
why he "got off".

There was not enough evidence and he
had a person on his side who knew how to
do his job well.

But whatever you say your child ends up
believing that they were in fact not
believed.

And this is what you take with you when
you leave the courtroom and take one last
look at a place that is about truth and
justice for all.



Caught in the Crossfire

In matters concerning an allegation of child sexual assault the battleground where truth is fought out occurs in the courtroom. The often heated debates that occur between the two opposing sides of prosecution and defence rely heavily on the testimony and credibility of the child witness.

The child witness enters the court system in effect as the person accusing another of a crime, the primary evidence being what that child states happened. In most cases of child sexual abuse there is no corroborating evidence such as medical evidence and or other witnesses. The two strongest allies of this crime, secrecy and isolation of the victim, make the onus of proof dependent on a child's evidence. Against this evidence is usually a plethora of other evidence which ostensibly raises the question of how a man, who in every other aspect of his life may appear socially responsible, could perpetrate such a violent crime?

Many facts or evidence relevant to the case and which may assist the prosecution case, may be considered prejudicial to a fair trial. Therefore, facts concerning evidence of previous abuse of the witness or previous abusive behaviour by the accused to others, are inadmissible in evidence.

As an adversarial system, the presentation of the evidence, and the contesting of it, in court becomes a war of words, with the limitations of a child's vocabulary against the speed and eloquence of lawyers. The questions asked of them when they are giving their evidence are often weighted with confusing adult language. This means that the child doesn't only have to answer difficult and at times embarrassing questions, but has to understand them in the first place. Therefore responses that appear confused or vague because of a child's struggle with language, can be construed as insufficient or inconsistent evidence causing sufficient doubt in a jury to prevent conviction.

Children are by nature creatures of action and the time they spend as a witness is often fraught with delays while the lawyers argue points of law or carefully think through the questions they need to ask. As their legs start to shift so does their mind and the attention for detail often required as evidence is a huge task for someone who is unsettled, tired and perhaps at times bored.

Child witnesses are expected to accurately recall the details of distressing events, in the absence of the influences of fear, embarrassment and shame, and although the accused may not be in their sight, they are aware that he is present and listening to every word they utter. It is well known that the greatest fear of a child witness is having to face the accused (Goodman et al., 1992; Whitcomb, Shapiro & Stellwagen, 1985).

Goodman (1998) showed that children were more able to testify and gave more accurate information when giving their evidence in a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) room than in the courtroom. A child's emotional state will influence their performance as a witness both in examination and cross examination and less stressed children are able to provide more accurate information (Cashmore, 1992).

The fear and trepidation that children experience when facing the possibility of not only having to face their offender when they attend court, but also in the infinite period of time after this day, cannot be understated. When judgements about a child's performance as a witness is driven by their profile as a child rather than as a fearful victim, we are doing them a tremendous disservice.

The power of the offender over a child, in terms of fear, remains strong even after the abuse has stopped. At times it may become more intense because of the predictions of retribution promised by an offender should a child ever tell. Perhaps the question asked when assessing the reliability of the child as a witness should not be "How much expertise does this child have to be a reliable witness?", but rather "How much expertise did this offender have as a perpetrator of sexual abuse?"

Sometimes it appears that the mechanics of the legal system are second nature to all who work within that system. It is argued that the knowledge and practices required within the system are paramount in order to protect the rights of the accused and guarantee a fair legal process. But, to the families of children who have been sexually assaulted, thrown into this torrent, the system can be overwhelming, confusing, long and despairing. Studies have described the court experience for children as a short term stressor that eventually will be relieved and there is no doubt a heavy weight is lifted from witnesses and families after the evidence has been given (Goodman et al., 1992). But there is still a verdict to be reached and the outcome of a case for a child and family has longer term consequences. Families need to prepare themselves for uncertain outcomes.

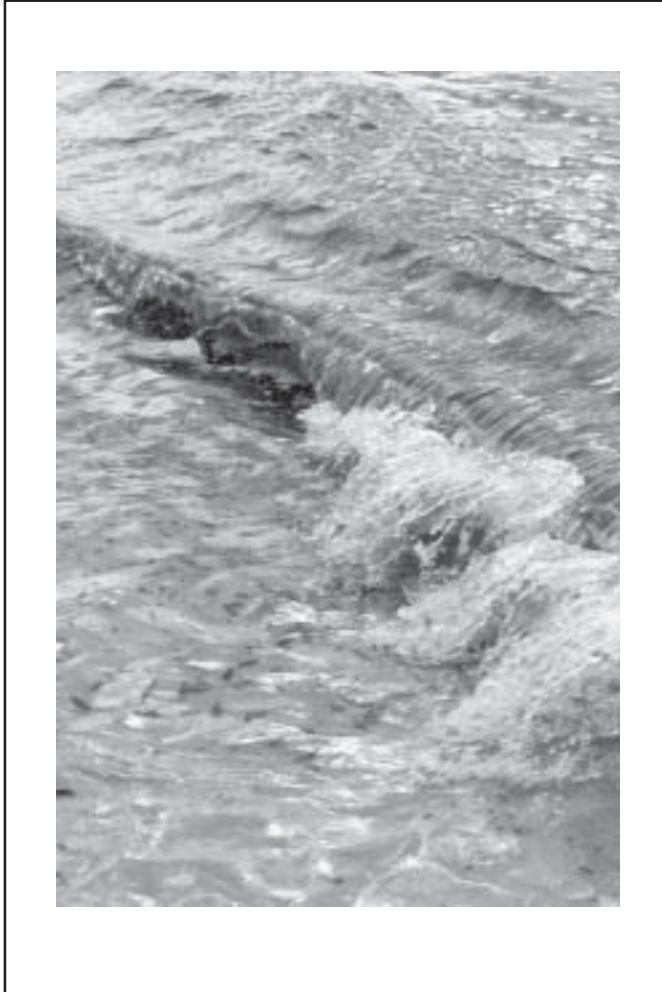
Where there is a finding of “not guilty”, parents of children who are a witness often reconcile themselves with the knowledge that their child did their best and showed great courage. They accept the sympathy from those around them who acknowledge how difficult it is to gain convictions in child sexual assault matters. But the reality they are left with is that the person who offended against that child can go free and they often must deal with his continued free presence in the community they live in.

The parents of a child who has been sexually assaulted must hold their tongue when they hear stories of the offender's good deeds from his continued supporters, hold their breath when they see him in the shopping centre or driving his car down the street or watering his front garden, hold their anger during those long nights when their child cannot sleep and reflect on how uninterrupted his sleeps must now be, and hold their fear for other children who may also be harmed by him.

For families where there is a finding of "not guilty" Truth and Justice become the greatest casualties of all, and this is a devastating blow for them.

The writings that follow are not prescriptions of what could happen because every person's experience can be so different. But as sexual assault workers who enter the legal system with families, we believe it is very important to never predict the process or the outcome. Just try to stay afloat. Families who have experienced the legal response to the allegation of sexual assault to their child have told us that staying upright and not capsizing is the strongest message they would share no matter what verdict is received. However, a verdict of 'guilty' does make that voyage seem so much more worthwhile.

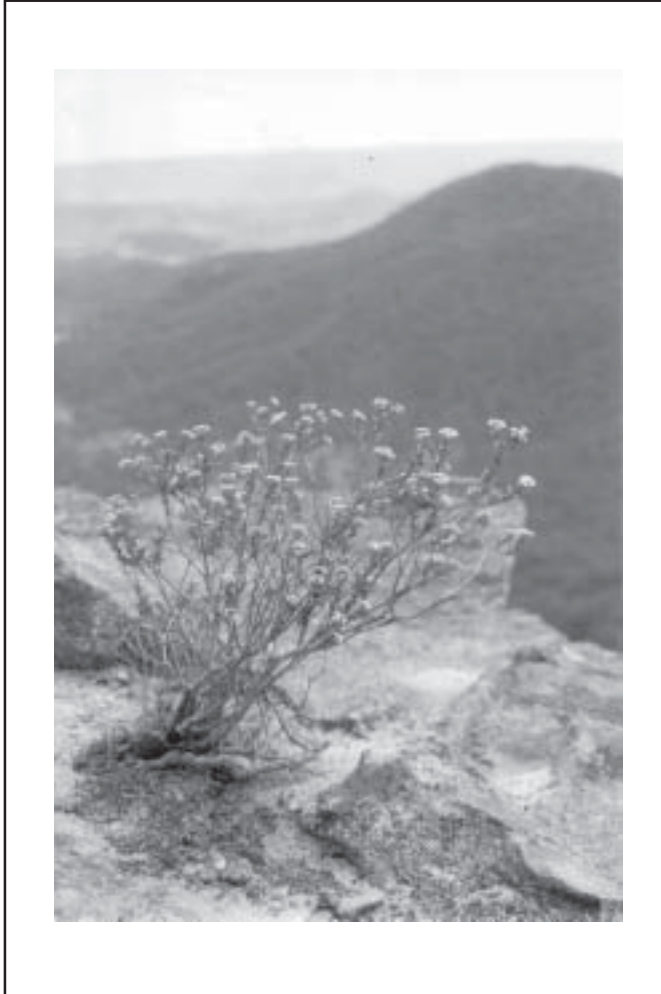
The following pages hopefully provide acknowledgement to those who have taken this path and managed to stay with their child on it, no matter where it took them.



Top Ten

The questions that children ask most about going to court.

1. Will he be there?
2. Will I have to see him?
3. Do I have to talk to him?
4. What if he says something to me?
5. Where will he be when I am in court?
6. What if he looks at me and I get upset?
7. What if he walks past me while I'm waiting.
8. What if people believe him and not me?
9. What if he tries to follow me after court?
10. Why does he have to be there?



A House of Straw

You enter this tall building but the lack of safety feels as though you may as well be going into a house of straw.

The emotions and experiences that occur during the time parents are immersed in the criminal justice system have a significant impact on their lives. Parents have identified these issues from their involvement with the legal process:

Helplessness

- The feelings of being unable to protect their child that arose from the sexual abuse were replicated during the legal intervention.
- Anxiety and distress that their child had to go through the ordeal of being a witness, feeling most times powerless to do anything to soften this experience.

Ignorance

- Anxiety and uncertainty about the process the legal system would take. This lack of knowledge, particularly being unable to answer their child's questions, made them feel that it not only increased their vulnerability but also failed them in their role as the parent and defender of their child.

- Concern about their own role as a witness, what they would be required to answer and, if they made mistakes, if that would influence the outcome of the case.

Fearfulness

- Fears of seeing the offender at court, as well as his entourage of support people, usually known also to them. The division within the group of people known to both the offender and child as to who to believe often meant that once close family members and friends were now seen as hostile co-conspirators with the offender himself.
- Fears extended to concerns about possible retribution after the court case and their inability to protect their family.

Entrapment

- The lengthy time frame of the legal process meant often that they continued to be imprisoned by the abuse. Parents stated that their lives were put on hold while they waited for the matter to be investigated, taken to court, and a verdict reached. They could put it to the back of their mind and get on with their daily lives to an extent, but it always lingered there, waiting and waiting to sweep over them when the time came. The criminal process tended to impede progress and recovery, thereby prolonging the impact of the abuse.

Resolution

- Countering this often despairing experience was the strongly conveyed message that the justice they were seeking was not about their duty as a citizen of the state, but rather their duty as the parent of a child who had been so badly hurt. It was this connection to their child, and not any other, which was the force pulling them through.



Showing Up And Not Having A Seat

Going to court was like going to a movie and finding that you didn't have a seat. So you stand but you don't want to be in anyone's way so you stand back. Against the wall. You think you should be saying something but you don't know what to say so you say nothing.

You ask your child if they want something to eat or drink and you go and get them something. You try to read a book and look up every time you hear footsteps in case it's your child's time to go into the courtroom. She asks you how much longer and you say words that at the moment seem so often said, "I don't know". She asks if you can go for a walk and get some fresh air but you worry that you'll "miss something" and say that you have to stay. She asks for how long and you again say, "I don't know".

You see him and his entourage of supporters as they walk past and you take her hand and let them pass while you keep your silence. Because that is what you do when you don't know what to do.

But now I think I would be different. Parents do not usually stay silent when their child is in trouble or needs their support. Whether it is a visit to the doctor or the teacher or the counsellor you don't stay silent and you don't stand in a corner.

You take a seat and from that place you speak for your child. So mark your place. Sit at a seat or ask for one. And when you hear footsteps and receive a nod of recognition place your feet firmly in your shoes and walk toward that person as the parent of your child.

Find your voice and if you can't, then make up a voice that will do the job for you.

Ask questions of anyone who is there for the case. I found the police officer that had investigated the case to be my best friend and greatest colleague when I was at court. If told to wait ask where? If told that something has happened ask what? And why? And what happens next? If they don't know, ask them if they can find out for you.

And mark your place with your child. Take whatever needs to be taken with you on that day to support your child through their wait.

Puzzles and colouring books and card games and hand held games (with the sound off) and favourite stuffed toy and special token to hold and food and drink that will sustain what may be hours of waiting. And fill the space of silence between you and your child with cuddles and kisses, doing things together and being there together.

Knowing That Now

Parents we have spoken to did not know what to expect at court and therefore did not know the right questions to ask. This was a huge drawback for them.

It is important for any parent of a child to be able to gain as much information as possible so they could best advocate for their child.

Rights of a parent whose child has been sexually assaulted.

As the parent of a child who may be attending court as a witness there are certain rights you have or can assert, for your child:

- To be kept informed of bail conditions, hearing dates, court dates and to know who is in charge of your case.
- To know what charges are being laid.
- To accompany your child during court proceedings if you yourself are not a witness.
- To be informed of court results and future dates for court hearings prior to that date and to know when you will be required in court
- To be informed if the alleged offender makes a plea of guilty or not guilty or changes his plea.

- To make an application to the court to have a support person present while your child is giving evidence.
- To request a room to wait with your child away from the common areas and to take in food, drink and activities while you wait.
- To apply to the court for your child to be seated in a position where they will not have to face the alleged offender.
- To have a copy of your statements and to request an AVO, usually taken out by the police, to try and ensure that the alleged offender keep away from the child.

The Green Scarf

Green was always my favourite colour

I would wear green/paint everything green/love
green plants/even the green jellybeans

He hated green and especially when I wore green

He said it clashed with my eyes

Made my hair look dull

Made my skin look pale

Made my body look fat

So when I went to court,

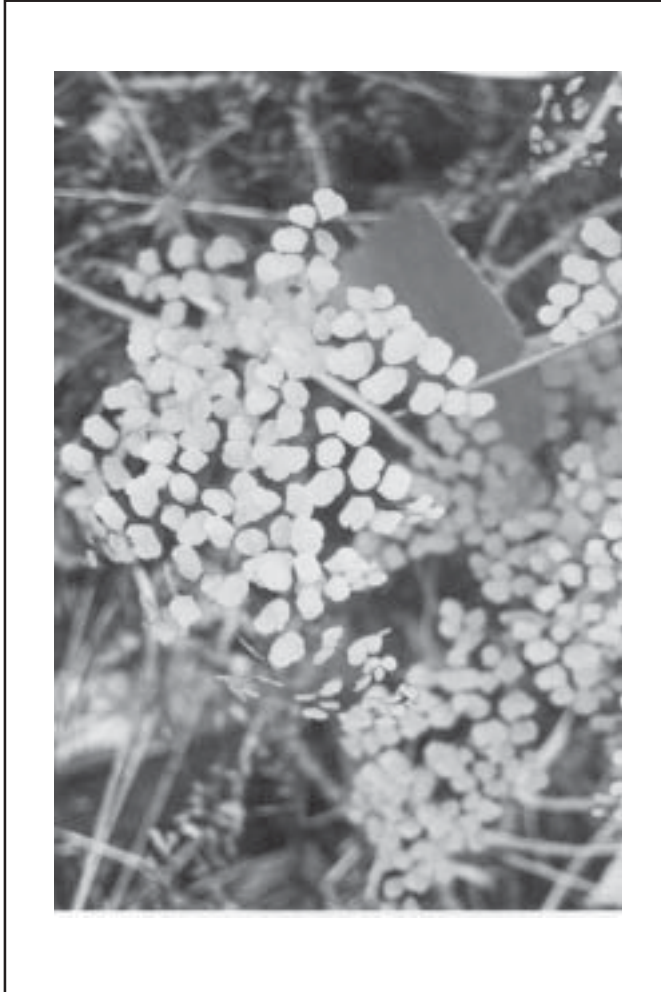
I chose the strongest colour of green I could find
- deep emerald green

A green scarf

Wrapped it around me - kept it close

And when I saw him see my green scarf

I saw one bit of me reclaimed from him.



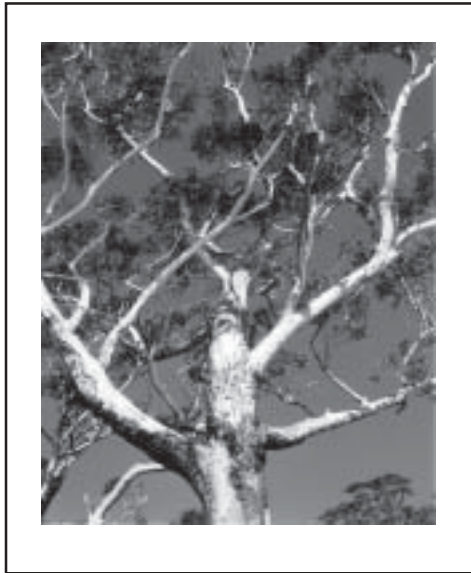
The Lion and the Mouse

I remember when I was a child reading an Aesop Fable that told of a lion who once saved the life of a mouse. Some time later the mouse, even though small, was able to return that favour and save the life of the lion.

As I sat waiting for my child to give her evidence I thought about this fable and my own life. I had always been a lioness to my child. I roared with joy when she was born, I roared with fear when she was ill, I roared with anger when someone hurt her, I roared with exasperation when she lost her favourite bracelet, I roared with pride when she starred in the school play. I roared with anguish when I learned that she had been assaulted. I roared at the offender, I roared at my family, I roared at the police, I roared at the prosecutor handling the case. I roared at anyone who I needed to tell about the pain that my child carried.

But as I sat waiting for her to be called into the courtroom my roaring had no place. It was now her turn to roar for herself. And she did.

Not with the loudness and brashness that I used, but in a quiet and small voice that the judge reminded her to raise so people could hear. She roared with the truth of what had happened to her. She taught me that a mouse, quiet and small, almost invisible against the backdrop of so many adult figures surrounding her, could roar like a lion.



Time after time

The first time we went to court I was so nervous
When we were told it was not going to go ahead that day
And we wouldn't be back for many months
I was very upset but also a bit relieved

I tried not to think about court that much
Until we had to go again
We went over what would happen again before the next time
But it didn't go ahead then either

It was five times that I went to court before the trial actually happened
By the end I didn't really think it would
I felt like it was all just a story I was in

Every time before we left to go to court Mum would get me a gift to make the day special
And then we came home upset and disappointed
And mum had to try hard to not show her upset
And do things to make me feel better

I had to have days off school and didn't
want anyone to know why
So we made up that I had appointments
In between times I would do my usual
things and have good times
But always having to go to court was on
my mind

It sat on my shoulder like someone
watching me
I could never feel that I was allowed to
forget about the bad stuff
I had to make sure that I could always
remember it
And that made me have to keep thinking
about it

I really wanted to think about other
things that made me happy
But I had to think about things that
other kids don't have to even know
That horrible things can happen to kids
Just like me

The Hardest Thing

They told me that court would be hard.
They said that the defence person would
ask me hard questions
That some questions may be hard to
answer
But to just do my best

I was ready for that hard time from the
defence person
But I wasn't ready for how hard it was to
say those things
About what had happened
I said the "thing" happened
But I had to say what the "thing" was
That was the hardest thing
After that everything else seemed not as
bad
I had said the hardest thing
The rest wasn't easy but it wasn't as hard
either

Just Tell The Truth

The defence barrister asked me lots of questions
He spoke nice sort of but some of the questions were hard
Sometimes I didn't get what he meant
I looked at the judge sometimes and he would ask the defence barrister to ask me the same question but in another way
I was going OK until he said that I wasn't telling the truth
I got upset because I was and I didn't know why he said I wasn't
He wasn't there and I was, so how did he know. But I guess that the person who assaulted me lied to him like he lied to everyone else
I stayed upset but answered the questions the best I could
My counsellor was there and that helped
She didn't say anything or even look at me
She told me before that she wasn't allowed to
But I smelt her nice smell like pretty flowers. And I knew she was there with me. I was glad when they told me that there were no more questions
And I could go
I felt tired but it was good to leave and good to know that I had told what happened

A Guilted Cage

You hear it in their voices.
You see it in their eyes.
You read it in their words.
Why couldn't she keep her daughter safe from
such a terrible thing.
And you have no answer.
A voice deep inside you agrees.

They never think to condemn him for the choices
he made. To take your precious child and rob her
of her rights. To make her live in haunted fear,
struggling for her life.

Hers becomes the blame, and yours.
We should have done it better.
Why didn't she tell?
Why didn't you know?
What sort of mother were you?
Perhaps you are mistaken.
It doesn't happen, does it?

It's very cruel for a woman like you
And quite disturbed for a girl like her,
To lay a charge on a man like him.

We speak the truth, but it stays unheard. The jury
says he is innocent and it never really happened. It
hurts so badly, but I guess that now, all that really
matters, is that she and I can hold each other again
and have left the dark behind.

Silent Witness

The day the case was stopped she cried and that was it - never again. Her tears were gone. We went to McDonalds and talked about school the next week and then we went home. I sat and watched T V with her and we never spoke. I held her hand and I cried with her but we never spoke. My head spoke a lot but there was so much that there didn't seem the space to say anything. Sentences spilled over from one to the next and it sounded like a tape being fast-forwarded in my head. So instead I sat with her and watched T V and said nothing.

Now I have some space in my head to sort out the sentences and say some things that I believe are important for her to hear.

Did she get that what happened in the case was not about her not being believed.

Did she get that she did the best she could and took on a task that should not be the task of children? Did she get that I listened to her give her evidence, listened to her strongly defy the accusations made that she was lying, listened to her expertly describe what had happened to her? So how do you honour someone for taking that stand? I went to school and took her from maths. We caught a train and then a ferry to the beach. We bought fish and chips and looked at the sea. We walked over rock pools and sat in the sun. It was the best day. Finding one best day can hold you for many days.

Rituals

We had to go to court nine times before the trial actually went ahead.

It was hard to go on that roller coaster so many times.

Each time the counsellor did court preparation but it became a bit of a joke for us all.

She started to prepare us for trepidation and then anticipation and then resignation.

We had plans about what to do when it got adjourned just one more time.

But each time we had to be ready just in case.

We would have a special outing the weekend before and go and buy a new outfit to wear.

It became one of those not so funny jokes that this was the way to get a new wardrobe.

The seasons were always different and during those three years she grew out of many of her dresses.

Every morning before we went we would have a nice breakfast together and talk about things that made us feel good.

We would make plans about how to spend the day if the trial didn't get a start.

Then I would give her a special gift for her day at court and tell her how great she was and how proud I was of her.

We would dress up and I would do her hair in some pretty way with ribbons.

We had a bag with all our court stuff in it and we were very practiced at collecting activities, food and Teddy.

It became a bit like going on a picnic for the day.

And then when it actually went ahead it was a sort of shock but we felt very at home in the court and felt like we had known the Prosecutor for years. Well, we actually had. The rehearsals were over and this was it. And her performance was great.

When It All Comes Together

The police got an AVO immediately and when he was charged six months later he was refused bail and spent six weeks in gaol. When he was granted bail, one of the conditions was that he could not live next door, so he had to move.

It was two and a half years later when the trial began. My daughter was six years old when he sexually assaulted her and she was nine years old when she went to court.

My daughter was clear and confident as she told her story through the CCTV. The video system made such a big difference. He was there hearing her but she couldn't see him and this kept her fears out of the room.

The court officer was also very supportive and helpful as I couldn't be in the room with her. That support and the presence of her counsellor was very important to my daughter.

I sat helplessly outside the courtroom, once again feeling sick to my stomach, knowing what my daughter was going through and I couldn't do anything. But she did have with her the guardian angel I had bought her. This was my connection to her.

He was found guilty on all charges and sentenced to five years prison with three years non parole.

And with his sentencing it felt like ours had finished.

Our sentence of silence was finished as we were heard.

Our sentence of fear was finished as our safety was considered.

Our sentence of shame was finished as he was blamed.

Our sentence of injustice was finished as he was made responsible

We have to get on with our lives and we can do that now.

I'm not sure if we would have moved on in the same way if he was found not guilty or if we had never gone to court.

A Hand to Hold



CHAPTER SEVEN

BIG THINGS COME IN LITTLE PACKAGES

A Hand to Hold

You try to believe that your child will never be hurt
And then your child is hurt
And what is left is the hope that they will not be
hurt again

You try to believe that justice will prevail
And then justice fails
And what is left is the hope that perhaps justice
will occur for the next child

You try to believe that the future is something to
look forward to
And then that future is blackened by doubt
And what is left is the hope that there will come a
time when the blackness fades

But what is there all the time that is so easy to
believe
Is the wisdom of your child's belief in magic
And the magic of your belief in their wisdom
And on this your hopes survive



COURT REPORTERS

Based on their court experiences, children have given advice on what was helpful to them and possible suggestions for change:

Who's the whatsi again?

- Court information is helpful but does not need to be so comprehensive that it is overwhelming.
- Certain basic ideas about the people who are “on their side”, what will happen on the day and who can be with them are the most important things they want to know.

It's good to know about court but you can't remember everything.

It's good to know about the Judge and the people on your side and where you will sit. It's having someone on the day with you to explain things as they happen that helps the most.

Facing Worries

- Fears and worries about court are strong and can not be easily discounted
- Preparation about court in terms of their support people and what they can take with them to make them feel as safe as possible are important things to discuss and plan.

Your worries don't go away even if someone tells you not to worry about that. You still do. Like seeing him or getting in trouble. Sometimes you don't even know what you're going to worry about until it happens. The worries I had before court like seeing him would not be a worry now because I didn't see him. So the best thing to say about worries is to try and not have any because it's not until you go that your worries happen. Then it's too late to worry because they're already happening and you just have to handle them at the time.

You're Not Alone

- The involvement of their carers and/or support people reduce the sense of aloneness in the process. Providing information and support to their adult allies who are then able to reciprocate support to the child reduces their sense of anxiety and fear that they may be abandoned when having to take the stand as a witness. It is critical that an adult, most particularly their nominated support person, accompany them during both court preparation and visiting the DPP. Children find it extremely important to meet the Crown Prosecutor, visit the court to see the Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) room, and to visit the room they will be waiting in.

Knowing when you find out that you have to go to court that someone who you like and who will look after you will also be with you makes you feel safer. You know that person will never leave you and that means that no one can hurt you when you're at court. The person goes with you to see the Prosecutor and when you look at the courtroom and CCTV room. They ask questions and they check out before if you have any questions and ask them for you. You know that they will be there when you have to say what happened and although they can't talk they sit close by and you know you're not alone.

Meeting the prosecutor helps you also feel not so alone. They are a normal person and you know they believe you and are on your side. They will be there to help you at court when you have to give your evidence.

Seeing the CCTV room makes all the talking about it make sense. It seemed a bit weird how it worked when you were told about it but when you sit down in the chair and see how the TV goes on, you know what's going to happen on the day of court.

Having An Important Job To Do

- Identifying the reason why children have to attend court e.g. trying to make a stand against the abuse and acknowledging that courage gives them a sense of strength and value.
- Returning constantly to these qualities by comparing them to other ways they use these skills in day to day living, enhances their sense of personal competency.
- Balance that with acknowledgement that this is a difficult task and all their fears and concerns are justified and not illusive.

The best thing that was said to me was by my police person She said that I had a very important job to do today (at court) and I was the only one who could do this job. Other people, like her, also had jobs and they were the only people who could do their jobs. My mum had a job, my support person had a job, the police and the prosecutor had a job...even the judge had a job and...even the person who was on the side of the person who hurt me had a job. But all I had to do was my job — to tell what happened. She also said she thought I could do it... and I did. Even though the person who hurt me was found not guilty I had done my job. **But someone wasn't doing their job because he got off.**

Check ups

- Having information about court at different times is helpful.
- Keeping them informed about where their own case is up to.
- Having “refresher” sessions to help them believe that they have the necessary knowledge to deal with the task ahead of them.

When you go to court it seems a long way away and you sort of forget about it until it comes up. Talking about court early helps because you have some things you want to ask and then you want to forget. When court comes closer it's good to be reminded about some of those questions you had and any new ones you have now. It helps to know what's happening, even if it's a long way away. If you're told that you won't hear from the police for a few months, because nothing is going to happen until then, you know why you don't hear anything. But if you're not told that it will be a few months you wait to hear from them sooner and then you worry why you haven't heard from them. Have they forgotten about you? Has the person who hurt you run away and they can't find him? Has it all happened without you knowing? If people tell you or tell your mum, then you know that you can stop thinking about it for a while. Your mum will tell you if she knows anything, so you don't have to think about it.

Check Lists

- The development of a resource package which the child has ownership of, can refer to at different times, or add their own resources to, increases their sense of preparedness and ownership of the knowledge they are accumulating.
- It is useful to have a checklist, so that they know what they need to do and pack everything that might be useful to take.

Having things to take to court really helps. If you have lots of things then there's lots of things to do to keep you busy. Having a bag for court makes you feel ready. Take games that don't make a noise like cards. Travel games are good because they're small to fit in your bag. Have drink more than food because you get thirsty and you don't feel like eating much. Snack foods are the best.

Just spend time playing lots of games and don't look at the clock. Check the time by guessing how many games it will take until it's your turn to go in.

Why say "Supercalla fragilisticxpialidotious" when you can say "Great"

- The strongest messages of the children were about the court process and how changes could be made, in the process and the language used. Their naivety about the use of language in court is that they saw it more as an inadequacy that lawyers had rather than purposeful legal jargon which was used as a tool to gain evidence but could also confuse and unsettle witnesses. This highlighted their generous trust in adults and a belief that, as witnesses, their status as a child warranted consideration.

The person who asked me to say what happened was a nice man but he didn't know how to talk to children.

My mum knows how to talk to children and my teacher and my counsellor and a few other people. You know - nice and slow, keep away from big words.

You might have to ask the question again. Don't ask two questions at the same time because we can only answer one at a time.

Sometimes there was a long break between one question and the next...lots of papers being shuffled....made it hard to keep still.

They should know pretty much what they will ask before they come in and have their questions ready.

You know you're there to say the truth and try and say what happened. Why else would you be there? There are lots of other places where a kid would like to be. So it would be good if you could just answer the questions as quick as possible and then leave.

Sometimes you have to sit and wait while the lawyers and judge talk among themselves and they say it has nothing to do with you. But sometimes it takes a lot of time and you get bored. You start kicking your legs and getting thirsty. It would be good if they did the talking on their own so you could have a break.

Big Things Come in Little Packages

There was a microphone but they said it was like a tape ...recording what I said. It didn't make my voice louder so I had to speak up. Sometimes my voice got quiet and I had to say the same thing again. If there is a microphone why can't it make my voice louder as well as record what I say?

A Hand to Hold



Rights of the child witness

- Right to take their stand against the crime of sexual abuse.
- Right to be seen as a credible voice in an adult system.
- Right to be treated with respect as a child witness.
- Right to information that is made coherent to them.
- Right to be protected from risk of harm (physical or emotional)
- Right to be supported through a confusing and difficult legal process.
- Right to competent and supportive legal representation.
- Right to know that their role as a witness is a valued one.
- Right to know they are doing something for the betterment of criminal justice.
- Right to know they are not to blame or in trouble.
- Right to have all those in the criminal process protective of their emotional wellbeing at all times.
- Right to be spoken to in language that they understand.
- Right to be supported by their carer throughout to process.
- Right to be given feedback that they are believed no matter what the outcome.
- Right to exit the legal process without further emotional trauma.

Victims Rights Act 1996 Amended 2002 (Rosie's Place Consultations with parents and children)



Count to Ten and Start Again

I took a special gift with me when I went into that courtroom.

It was a charm bracelet.

My mother bought it for me two days before court.

We had a big family meal and everyone who came bought me something for my bracelet.

My grandmother gave me an angel to watch over me and keep me safe.

My mother gave me a key which she said was to her heart.

My brother gave me a horseshoe for good luck.

My aunt gave me a four leaf clover to remind me of my family.

My uncle gave me a cupid and said "shoot straight with the truth".

My best friend gave me a ballet shoe to remind me of how we go dancing together.

A Hand to Hold

My best friend's mum gave me a butterfly because she said I had the beauty of something so special.

My big sister gave me a book to remind me of the stories I love to read.

My mum's best friend gave me a frog because she knew I really like green frogs and slept with one of the biggest green frogs she said she had ever seen.

And I gave me a heart to remind me of how many people cared for me and were on my side.

I wore this bracelet into court and every time I felt upset or frightened or worried I took one of the charms into my hand and knew that they were with me.

The Man in Blue

When I had to give my evidence I didn't have anyone with me.

At the last moment they said that my support person may have to give evidence and couldn't go in with me.

My mum also had to be a witness and she couldn't go with me.

No one I knew could go with me.

A man in blue came to the room and called my name.

He went with me to another room and asked me to sit in the chair.

I had seen this room before when I came to see the Prosecutor and knew about the television and how what I said would be shown in the courtroom.

The man in blue fixed my chair so it was a bit higher.

He got me a sort of box thing to put my feet on.

I think he wanted me to stop swinging my legs.

A Hand to Hold

The man in blue poured some water in a glass and said that it was for me if I got thirsty.

The man in blue told me that it would soon be time for the television to go on and I would see the inside the courtroom.

The man in blue sat down on a chair next to the door.

Constable Plod

Constable Plod is a bit of a clod
With a uniform made out of blue
His buttons are shiny
His hair a bit slimy
And his feet covered in a black shoe.

My mum brought him home
And said "He's your own...
To take with you when you're in court
Just keep him with you
And whatever you do
Know he carries my love and my thoughts".

I took him to court
And he did what he ought
Stayed silent but stuck like a bee
He hooked onto my arm
And that helped me stay calm
To know he was staying with me.

People asked me his name
And what gave him such fame
Was that I had an interesting friend
But the truth is quite droll
Plod's a real living doll
And that's where my story will end.

A Hand to Hold



Cuddles and me

On the day that the trial went ahead I
felt OK.
Mum did my hair a special way with
ribbons in it.
And I wore a brand new outfit.
That made me feel nice on the outside
and also on the inside.
I had my special teddy bear Cuddles with
me.
I had got Cuddles when I was 6 years old
and every night he slept with me.
Mum had bought a new outfit for
Cuddles too,
Baby clothes and glasses.
That morning mum had given me a lovely
present.
It was a love heart with my name.
And the words "I love you" written on it.
I also had a little Guardian Angel to pin
on my dress.
I was very familiar with the court and all
the people there.
The Crown Prosecutor felt like a friend.
He took us to a room to wait.
There was me, my mum, my counsellor and
the police officer.
People kept popping in to tell us what was
happening.

A Hand to Hold

My counsellor had bought a big bag of games and food.

We must have played Snakes and Ladders and Old Maid a hundred times.

When it was my time to go in I was a bit worried especially when Cuddles was not allowed to go into the CCTV room.

But my counsellor was with me, and the man who looked like a policeman was nice to me.

It felt good to have them in the room with me.

There was a box of tissues and a glass of water on the table if I needed them.

I didn't know what to do but the man stood up with a Bible and I remembered what I had been told would happen about having to promise to tell the truth.

The Prosecutor went through all the stuff with me, asking me questions about my statement. I had to draw pictures about some of the things. The Prosecutor was kind and his questions helped me remember things. I knew he was on my side.

It was OK telling about what happened.

Be prepared

Next week we are going to court.
My mum and I. I have to tell the judge
about the rude stuff the man did to me.
I told my mum and the police lady.
And my mum told the counsellor.
I don't know why they just can't tell the
judge.
I feel a bit shy saying that stuff and I think
the man might be angry.
The counsellor tells me the judge especially
wanted me to tell him.
I am the most important person he wants to
listen to.
They will make sure I don't have to see the
man.
We pretend I am a superstar telling truth to
the world.
My counsellor tells me about the court and
we find the best superstar outfit to
wear..it's my special velvet party dress.
We paint superstar love hearts on my hand
to remind me of how brave I am and that
my mum loves me. I chose Mandy doll to be
my assistant. It will be a very important day
so I can have a holiday from school.
And we make plans for fun to fight fear
and being bored - colouring books and
picture games. And afterwards a superstar
party in the park.

On and On

I am a bit scared when that man with the bushy eyebrows takes me into the TV room.

It is very cold.

I hold my Amy doll tight and put my Fairy Bluebell statue on the desk near the microphone.

Jenny, my counsellor, sits next to me and another nice lady is in the corner.

We make jokes and laugh a bit before the TV comes on.

Then people start asking me questions.

I feel a bit important and answer them in the microphone.

Then the people in the court tell me they are going to listen to my video evidence and I have to stay very quiet. That is so hard.

It goes on and on and on.

I think it must be a whole hour.

I try to sit still but it is too hard.

I play with my Fairy Bluebell.

She has pretty glitter wings.

I pretend she is a baby and I am her mum.

I give her hugs and look after her pretty wings.

I feed her honey and flowers.

I rock her to sleep and put her to bed.

She wakes up and starts dancing all over
the table,
She nearly falls off so I put her safely
away.
Then I am so bored!!
I keep yawning.
My feet want to run and jump so I
bounce them up and down.
The microphone is big and black and is
looking at me so I pretend it is my pet dog
and I start patting it and kissing its nose.
I think it might be fun to blow it in the
face.
So I do.
Big strong blows and then I giggle.
Suddenly everyone in the court starts
looking at me on the TV and Mr Bushy
Brows runs out of the court and into my
room to tell me to stop.
Bored again. Nothing to do.
I can't talk. Jenny can't talk.
I cuddle my doll Amy and look at Fairy
Bluebell.
They are tired and so am I.
My tummy is rumbling.
I want to see my mum....
Now at last have they finished?
The man says he wants to ask me some
questions.
It's my turn to talk again.

Starbright

I am Angie, Superstar
Bringer of truth to the world
I tell of bad things that have happened
And even judges wish to hear my words
I enter court bravely with my trusted
companion, Mandy doll
My beautiful velvet dress tells everyone
that I am the star
Microphones and TVs are set in place,
Awaiting my words
I tell the truth
All listen
Angie has spoken



Magic Fairy Dust

She bounced into the CCTV room as if she was going to a party.

A tiny five year old princess

She clutched her new little fairy that was spreading fairy dust everywhere today.

Magic to speak the unspeakable.

"She won't open her mouth" they all predicted.

"She refuses to talk about it", everyone said.

But today she was there covered in fairy dust.

And her sister and brother and best friend were there with her.

And when it was all over mum would take her to a royal feast at McDonalds.

Fairy Jasmine sprinkled her magic all through the room.

The TV went on and Princess Amanda's tiny voice told of the wrong done to her.

A moment of magic, or was it

A moment of courage?



CHAPTER EIGHT

TRAVELLING TOWARD TOMORROW

What takes you by surprise
Is not what you do for your children
But rather what you have to stop
Yourself from doing

(Kathy - mother's group).

The sun follows me everywhere I go
But when it does it has to leave my mum
So I think that for tomorrow
I'll lend the sun to her

Lost and Found

I have lost my child and she has lost her childhood. I have lost my partner and she has lost her father. I have lost my identity as a mother and she has lost her identity as a daughter. I have lost my memories for they are not what they seemed at the time. She has got to lose her memories for they will haunt her and punish her if she doesn't. I have lost my past, my present, and my future. And what of her past, her present and her future? Can that still be found. What else is to be found? He was responsible for the taking but who is responsible for the keeping? Am I the keeper of all that is left? How do I take back what has been taken from us? You search for what remains. You search the debris of the rubble for that small piece from which to build a future. Her face when she is now asleep in peace and safety. Her laugh when we sit and watch television together. Her hair, which she still has me brush and tie together. Her breath when she is in restful sleep and not visited by the nightmares and fears of the night. Our yelling at each other that is not about blaming each other but about normal fighting over normal things like any normal house. Can we find each other again? Can I find my motherhood and she her childhood? If I find me again then I can help her on her treasure hunt.



About Tomorrows

There is no formal introduction to this chapter. We can find formal words to write about the “grooming process” and the impact of sexual assault on people’s lives and how the legal system works and doesn’t work. But no formal text can write about how people take on tomorrows.

They do take on tomorrows because they have to and they find ways because there isn’t a choice.

And the ways they tell of this duty to find life again are said in words and phrases, at times even in silence. Any attempts at formal descriptions of this journey pale into insignificance.

There are few passages written by children in this chapter and this was a direct consequence of what children told us.

The children were brief and succinct in their descriptions of how they intended to move on. They wanted to forget about it and said that they would use everything they had to do this.

They were in a race to get on with their childhood and did not seem interested in spending time talking about how they would do this. They just would. We noticed that the children seemed impatient with adults meddling in their own journey forward.

Drawing on our experience we could say that their future may be revisited by the pain of their past and we know that struggles may occur when or if confronted with those uninvited memories. But in the face of such predictions, it seems futile to make such connections for children at a time in their lives when they don't want to give up any more space. And nor should they.

We do not want to “sugar coat” or gloss over the insidious nature of the crime of child sexual assault nor minimise the battles that children and families have to deal with because of the violent acts of abuse and betrayal they were subjected to.

All the children who spoke with us had been believed by caring adults and had been made safe, and had not been forced to maintain their secret. After telling about the abuse, they could rely on adults in their lives to take responsibility for acting on their behalf and being strong and supportive allies.

Alongside of their dealing with their own anguish they were able to find comfort and reassurance from their own personal resources as well as from others.

As the children travel toward tomorrow they remind us of the greatest possession that children have. . . . a belief in unlimited possibilities of what can come.

Wanna Bees

I wanna be rich
I wanna be famous
I wanna be a pop singer
I wanna be a top cricketer and play for
Australia
I wanna be Prime Minister
I wanna be a dancer
I wanna be a photographer and travel the
world taking pictures of interesting places
I wanna be a doctor and help people who
are sick
I wanna be like my big sister because she's
the smartest in our family
I wanna be like my mum because she's kind
and loves me
I wanna be like my brother because he rides
a Harley and looks cool
I wanna be a good swimmer and swim in the
ocean with dolphins
I wanna be someone who talks to children
like you do (What's that called again? -
A sexual assault counsellor, Yeah that)
I wanna be a judge like Judge Judy because
she tells people off
I wanna be a policeman because they help
you when you are in trouble
I wanna be who I am now but not with sad
stuff going on
I wanna be everything and everyone I can be

How Are You?

You know it's their job to say that
You know the girl at Woolworths who always
asks you that. Or the young lass in McDonalds
who says "Have a nice day"
And you look at them kind of weird and lots of
responses go through your head
Like my child was sexually assaulted you know
He got off and he actually shops in this store you
know
I haven't slept for I don't know how long and
My little child still has nightmares and wets the bed
The last time I really stopped crying was...I don't
think there has been a last time
My family is torn apart. Friends don't visit or call
me
My sister says I've got a real problem
I'm going from one appointment to the next
because of all the problems we're now dealing
with
But hey?
It's just your job to ask me that
So I'll just do my job as someone who wants so
badly to put this behind me and I'll just say "Fine
thanks" when they ask "How are you?"
And I'll thank them when they tell me to "Have a
nice day"
And maybe one day I won't have to pretend to
say those words

The Spiral Staircase

*I'm going up
I'm going up
As high as I can go*

*I'm going down
I'm going down
I'm going way down low.*

*Up..Up..Up..Up Up..Up..Up
Down ...down....down ..down .down
(ABC Playschool)*

You're singing this song that's on the telly
You're in the lounge room doing the usual grind of
Cleanup Kids

That's my version of Cleanup Australia.

You know the stuff that kids leave around

The empty plates and glasses on the floor

Bits and pieces of lego that fell off the latest
masterpiece

Clothes and more clothes

They must change for every meal

Socks and shirts and wet towels

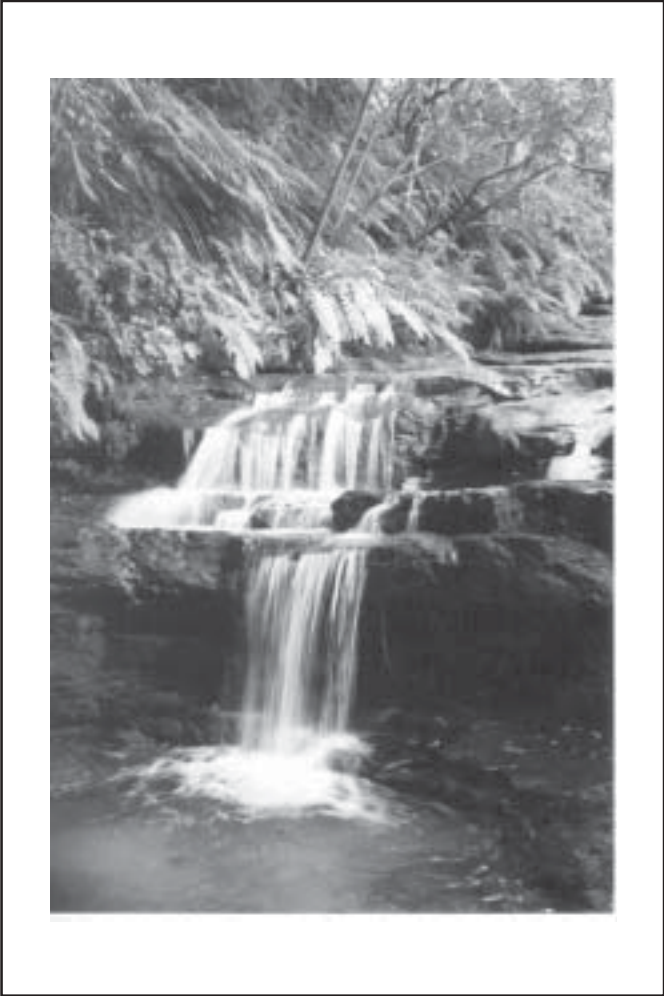
Textas and pencils and pencil shavings

That remind you of the crisis with last night's
homework

You know when you ask that question you wish you
hadn't

"When's it due"?

And they say "Tomorrow"
And then you see it...under the chair.....
Last night's homework
And you're singing that song in your head
And then you realise it's about you
You and your ups and downs. Your ups of hopes for
things to be normal
And those downs when you ask that one question
"Why did this have to happen to her?"
What happened isn't an accident
It isn't fate. It isn't bad luck. It's not what life is about.
It happened because someone chose to deliberately
hurt your child
And then you feel yourself going down once again
The despair of knowing this shouldn't have happened
at all
But you're getting use to this spiral staircase of up
and down
You hate it but you're getting use to it
And you know that you will climb it again and again.
Up and down
So you turn off the telly. You pick up the socks and
the pencil shavings and the empty plates and cups and
the homework book from last night
And like yesterday and tomorrow and the day after
And the day after that you head up those stairs and
out the door
At least the school is only a walk away
For the hope for normal things has paid a visit
With that forgotten homework book.



Moving Day

Today is moving day
You're not leaving your house
But you are moving
You've made up your mind
That today is the day to leave it behind you.

What will you take on this journey?
What is most precious to you that you must take
with you?
You can't take too much with you because you
need enough room for the new things you must
bring into your life
Making room will help bring the change
So to make that room you need to leave things
behind
Leave behind your anger
Leave behind your shame
Leave behind your guilt
Leave behind your self punishment.
And pack your precious things alongside your
hopes.

What's For Breakfast?

You pull yourself up and sit on the edge of your bed
Will you sit there for a few more hours or had you better get moving?
Lots of thoughts and conversations go over and over in your head
What if she had said this instead?
What if I had said this instead?
What is he doing now?
Now that he's out there and can do anything he wants.

That power over you...his power over you
It feels so strong
And now that power has some friends like the jury who didn't believe
And the people who turned up at court and clapped when the verdict was read out
Such a strong army pushing you down.

So you can sit there and feel that anger and hurt that is crushing you on the inside
You can sit and plan what you would like to happen to him
You can imagine and hope for someone to get him
But all of this just keeps you sitting.

It's like you're stuck under ice and you're swimming around trying to find a way out but the ice is too hard and there's too much and you're too tired to keep looking

Soon you know the ice will crush you... is that something to fear or something to hope for
So you sit and let the crush take over your body and mind.

And then she comes to the door and says,

'What's for breakfast?'

You take in that large breath of air that you need to keep afloat

You push your shoulders up through the ice trying to crush you

And hope that perhaps today the crack will be wide enough not to hold you under.

Voices In The Dark

For so many years she whispered and everyone said
she was painfully shy.

He robbed her of her voice to tell his secret.

And now she yells - all the time.

They didn't hear her at the police station.

They didn't hear her at the court.

They didn't hear her at school.

And now she will keep yelling until someone has the
time to listen-

To her pain.

Passing On The Pain

When he abused me he passed great pain
onto me
I used to think that somehow I might find
ways to pass that pain onto others
That if I could do that I might be able to
take it away from me
But I don't think that any more
The passing of this pain stops with me
And I will find a way to have it leave me
alone
And I will find a place where it cannot
find me.

Big and Small

You have worries in your head. Sometimes they're big.

You have to learn to get rid of them and not keep them so big.

This happens after a while.

Some worries will go away forever. Like when court is over.

That's a big worry gone.

Others will come back every now and then but they won't be as big as they were.

And when they come back you have to get rid of them as fast as you can.

Sometimes at night you'll get scared for no reason.

You think that someone is outside your window or you hear a noise in the house and think someone is inside. So you can get up and go into your mum's room and stay with her. And the scared feeling goes away.

Sometimes you can be going to a party and then at the last minute you don't want to go. You just feel a bit shy or worried.

So your mum stays with you at the party. She sits with the other adults. You can go off with your friends and then when you feel a bit worried you can see her.

And the worried feeling goes away.
Sometimes you can just be sitting still and
a sad feeling happens.
You can start to think about when you
were hurt.
So you have to think of something good
really quick.
Like something you did with your friends
or what you got for Christmas or where
you are going on holidays.
And the sad feeling goes away.
Sometimes you can get real angry. You
scream at people and you throw things
and you feel like your going to blow up.
So you get outside and ride your bike or
your skates
Or you kick a ball or just run around.
When my mum sees that I'm real bad she
takes me to the park and I go round and
round this bike thing. You have to pedal
hard to get it to move and then it spins
around.
And then the angry feeling gets tired and
goes away.
What happened to you will never go away
But the feelings about it can be made
really small.
You might have to do this a hundred
million times.

But you just have to keep trying

The Storyteller

You have given your child so many stories about themselves and their life

And now you ask where those stories have gone?

You can't let your child see that they have been stolen from you, or from her

For if you as the storyteller no longer want to tell those stories, how can they continue to learn and grow and believe in themselves?

So you become the storyteller of other stories - of believing them and believing in them

Of truth and justice

For if you lose those stories you lose so much of yourself.

Goodness is Gracious

The goodness will come

There are people with goodness and they exist in
this world

The badness wants you to go crazy

Go mad

Go ballistic

Go down

But what you now take with you on this journey
are new ideas and beliefs,

Knowledge and caution that will assist you and
guide you on that search

Be aware

Be open

Hold onto no secrets

Share your doubts

Share your emotions

Share your goodness

The Gift

Parents talk about the fact that they were responsible for their child being born and many qualities of their child stem from them.

The child may carry a resemblance in their characteristics that are said to belong to one or other parent, even grandparents or distant relatives.

What is often not talked about is what a child may give to their parents when they are born, a special gift that is usually locked away until a certain event causes it to be released.

It is a courage that cannot be compared to being there for anyone other than your child. Courage to fight and go on no matter what happens.

This courage is not unique to parents whose child has been sexually assaulted. It is there for parents who face other sorts of traumas in their child's life whether it be through illness or death or other hardships and struggles.

That gift is there to be saved for those moments when it is truly needed.

Unblock that place and it will see you through things that you never thought possible.



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