

Victim Impact Statement of Tori – The Victim in the [REDACTED] Series

I am a 17-year-old girl. I have never discussed anything “that person” did to me with anyone because it is too stressful to talk about it. Writing about it now makes me cringe. I know he started abusing my sister when she lived alone with him. I was nine years old when “that person” was finally arrested. I have a sense of when it all started—but I know it will never really end. “People” like him still share the images of what happened to me.

I’m upset with the lack of answers. I think the adults involved should have to admit what they knew about what happened to us or the ways they could have stopped it. I would sometimes see “that person’s” friend around town. She knew about him and what he was doing to us when it was happening. She brought the clothes to our house that we wore in the pictures. They were all the wrong size and were really inappropriate for girls our age. I still have so many unanswered questions. Why didn’t she tell someone sooner or go to the police?

I know that the police have the photo ID of another guy who hurt us in [REDACTED] and I think they should arrest him too. The police interviews were grueling. The interviewers were very rude to me. They tried to learn every detail about exactly what happened to us, but they did not care if they hurt my feelings while they did it. They made it seem like I was supposed to help them figure out what happened to me. They wanted me to describe what would be in those pictures for them—even though they could see the pictures for themselves. None of the process made any sense to me. It was upsetting for me that nothing was going to happen unless I testified. I felt the weight of this investigation on my own shoulders and I was too hurt to carry it sometimes. I wish they were more caring and comforting when I needed it most. They can’t get the other man off the street. Apparently, the pictures are not enough to arrest the other person responsible for abusing me. I just don’t understand.

My abuser was never nice to my brother, and he was never nice to us for any of the right reasons. He would explode in anger and throw furniture. We were afraid of him. “That person” told us not to tell anyone what he was doing to us. He told us that we couldn’t betray just one parent. Sometimes I wanted to tell anyway, but he manipulated me into staying silent back then. People in the town we lived in did not even want to let us stay in their house when the police were searching our house for evidence of what “that person” did to us. Instead, we had to wait outside in the winter cold while we were sick. These same people later blamed and shamed my mom—they wouldn’t even let their kids play with us. We had to hide from people. They made up terrible rumors. In their mind, we were part of the problem that he caused. They defined us by his actions instead of our own. After the abuse, we moved around a lot and tried to rebuild our sense of community. I don’t know how my mom has not just given up. He still punishes us for telling others about the horrible things he did to us.

I can make friends, but we moved a lot and it strained our relationships. We used to live in a place where there were no friends to make. The people around us were hopeless. I felt that way too. Sometimes, I still feel that we are trapped no matter where we go. We had to move so many times and lived in upsetting places. It felt like we went backwards some years. Kids and

even teachers were mean to my sister and it upset us all. One year, we had to go to public school because someone made a false report and we could not be homeschooled anymore. Another time, there were three fires in our town and people blamed my brother for it. Thankfully, my mother advocated on my brother's behalf and eventually my brother didn't get into trouble for something he didn't do. One place we lived was cold and it leaked when it rained. There was nowhere to go to be outside, we were stuck inside where it was still cold and wet. There was nothing to do. The best thing we could do was take a long trip to Trader Joes which takes a long time because it was so far away. I hated the feeling of being trapped like that.

All of this, everything, is related to "that person" and the things he did to us and the pictures he took. We lost so many people and moved so many times. All the bad things that happened in our lives revolve around his actions—he ruined our lives. Last year, I did not sleep more than three hours a night. I still get worried about going to work and having to act like everything is fine. When I was younger, before I was abused, I could just decide to go to sleep. I haven't slept like that since. I lose a lot more sleep now. It's hard to remember any dreams. I only remember being really frustrated in my dreams.

I am sometimes upset when I think about what happened to me, but I try not to think about it. I can't always remember all of the things that happened. Unfortunately, there are pictures out there to remind me that it is still out there even when I forget it. The fact that there are pictures out there make it so that I can't help but remember the things that I desperately want to erase. I feel hopeless and I get embarrassed about it. I feel self-conscious and exposed. I think about eating all day and I'm worried that my weight changes when I get stressed. Sometimes I feel scared, but mostly numb a lot of the time. I cannot escape the reality of those pictures, so I feel nothing. I haven't had any therapy in the recent years. We talked to one social worker, but that was just so they could get information. It wasn't really for us, and it did not feel helpful. It put a lot of pressure on me. My life has been completely ruined even if I act happy. I missed out on a normal childhood. This feeling I get about what happened to me won't go away inside, and the pictures mean it is here to stay forever.

There have only been a couple people who really cared about what happened to us. We have had to escape from all the places that we've lived. Everything is stretched so thin. Our car is really inadequate, but we have to drive it for work. Even though we have a long commute for work, we are finally living in the right place. It is so beautiful, and it feels like home. I don't know how we will ever overcome all of the problems "that person" caused us, but I know that we worked very hard to get this far and that we will keep going.

In the past year, I started to work at the same restaurant as my mom so we can make some money together. I know how hard it is to make money now. I did not want to work in a restaurant at first, but I learned to push through it. People are terrible sometimes. I had to be really careful to make sure I felt that no one would ever judge me like they did before. We now live where I can go outside and run around with friends. I want to be able to work and hang out with kids my age like everyone else.