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SURVIVING CHILD PORNOGRAPHY: FIFTY YEARS ON

Jeanette Westbrook

Space International

KEYWORDS

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FIFTY YEARS AGO, I suffered and survived home-based “production” of child pornography. The products from this type of abuse are now called “child sexual abuse material”—CSAM. The making of child sexual abuse material does not begin to describe what many survivors experience. For me, my father—the child rapist, pedophile—sought to dehumanize, silence, torture, and control my mind and body. The use of a child in the production of child sexual abuse material is an adjunct to incest, torture, and abuse, both physical and mental; later, there was sex trafficking, which is prostitution (not “sex work”). I suffered from physical illnesses and had to be hospitalized.

The images and videos of child sexual abuse are criminal and illegal material; they are insurance that can be used to blackmail the survivor and blackmail people who view and use it.

Why are these images and videos made? Because the perpetrators can—there is little to stop the producers, viewers, and distributors of these tortures inflicted to give pleasure to those who seek power, profit, and pleasure.

All of what I describe here has been documented, vetted, and submitted to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women (in 2007) as an example of extreme violence against women and girls. It is archived at the United Nations in Geneva. All I recount here I have given to law enforcement and over 20 organizations in my attempt to hold accountable those perpetrators who committed multiple crimes against me over many years. I participated in a felony prosecution of my abuser in 1992.

I was eight years old. I will never forget the camera’s flashing lights and whirling sounds. I can’t stop flashing back in my mind when someone takes my picture with a flash. Now, when my photo is taken these many years later, it evokes momentary freezing. And I haven’t forgotten the criminal acts that came before or after the abuse material was made either.

However, for me, there is one felony criminal act that trumps them all: knowing that the pictures and 8 mm films taken of me as a child are now reformatted with the latest technology and uploaded to the internet or the black net platforms with no

termination date. My trauma will live beyond my years on earth. Law enforcement personnel have told me that the kind of photos and videos taken of me—father-daughter incest—bring the highest money. The power differentiation involved, the ownership of me as a child by my father, the access to my body, and the (forced) compliance of obvious torture and suffering are all prized by perpetrators.

So, what happened to me before and after I was used to produce child sexual abuse materials? Let me begin with the background of the family I was born into. This account is only the bare basics, and the description of my feelings and details is minimal.

I am one of four children born to my biological mother, who was an only child. My mother was raised by a woman who was not her biological mother, but I was told she was my grandmother. My mother was the illegitimate daughter of a doctor—a man I never met or knew. She married my pedophile father at age 15 and bore my oldest brother at age 16.

My father was born in Harlan County, Kentucky, which was referred to as “a third world country” by social scientists, particularly President L. B. Johnson in the 1960s (Nelson Jones, 2000). His ticket out of Eastern Kentucky was through the Marine Corps. After serving in the Korean War in shipping supplies, my father worked as a welder and, at the time of my birth, was working to help build the uranium enrichment plant in Paducah, Kentucky, a place that enriched uranium for nuclear bombs. Later, he became a mechanical engineer working in the nuclear industry and moved to work in the Kentucky state government in the Department of Public Safety. When I testified against him in a criminal prosecution, he worked at the national level controlling all the inspections of nuclear power plants. Ironically, my father worked toward the death that the nuclear industry has produced.

I often think of my family as an “explosion” of violence. All of my siblings were abused physically, sexually, and mentally. Incest was normalized; domestic violence routine. Seven members of my fathers’ family—uncles and cousins—sexually abused me and my sister, who was a year younger than me. I witnessed my oldest brother being beaten with a two-by-four. By the age of 19, he was shooting heroin and later became a major drug trafficker supplying our high school with an arsenal of drugs. I grew up with illegal drugs all around me, and I used them. It was normalized for me during the incest, abuse, and later trafficking by my father and others. Drugs were used to make me compliant, distort my memory through blackouts, and facilitate and manipulate my disassociation—a blessed capacity that I believe saved my sanity.

The abuse and drug use as a young child resulted in significant learning and speech delays. In the second grade, testing revealed my IQ was only 80 points. My trauma was so significant I only spoke gibberish and was extremely hyperactive. I was fortunate that I was not put into learning disabled classes. Before the school could take further testing and action to label me, my family moved to a different area and a new elementary school.

I was sex trafficked beginning in grade school. Men picked me up while I was walking home from school. They told me my father sent them to pick me up. By my teenage years, I was missing huge amounts of time in school because I was trafficked to Ohio, New York, Kentucky. One of the men who flew me to New York was a friend of my father, his attorney, and a former Mayor of Louisville, Kentucky.

I was trafficked until the age of 24. People ask, how can this be? I was a compliant victim who responded to my father’s commands. He used my dissociated self and, like other pimps and traffickers, gave me a name that was used to facilitate the abuse. At

age 24, I began to run, living in 23 places in two years. I tried to go to college at the time, having scored high enough on the ACT to be admitted, but I soon dropped out in my first year without any support. Mostly I was homeless. I lived in friends' apartments. I traded sex for food, and sometimes I slept in cemeteries, where I felt safe. I was a lost soul.

Flash forward: at age 28, I met and married my husband, Andrew, who, if knights in shining armor are real, he was the real deal. Like myself, he was a musician, and he had graduated from college. We never had children. Neither did the rest of my siblings, a telling factor about the amount of abuse we suffered. It is statistically rare for four children in one family to have no children. The next generation would not be born to abuse. What impressed me about Andrew at the time was that he and a friend hitchhiked across the US to see the national parks. I easily could have hooked up with an abuser, and it was just plain luck that Andrew pursued me. After our marriage, it did not take him long to figure out what was going on with my father and me. He began to monitor the mail and the phone, protecting me from my father's attempt to get access to me. For the first time in my life, I felt safe enough to tell him about my life. I later found out that I had been telling friends all my life, but no one knew how to help.

I got 14 years of therapy with two different therapists. My second therapist was the son of Holocaust survivors. I didn't have to wonder if he believed my accounts of torture and near-death experiences. By this time, my social self began to flourish largely because I could talk about my experiences and embrace my anger. I was then able to re-enter college.

In 1992, I learned there was no statute of limitations on felony crimes in Kentucky. I started a criminal prosecution against my father by reporting the crimes to the Louisville Crimes Against Children Unit. As much as possible, I also reported the other perpetrators, the times, and the places.

Fortunately, I worked with a great police detective—whose wife was a social worker. The detective became a strong advocate in the prosecution and took my calls regularly. I was harassed, stalked, and threatened with death throughout the trial. I was also offered a great deal of money to drop the case, which I refused because I felt that I would soon be found dead if I accepted the money.

The case was a three-year journey in the criminal justice system, which produced huge amounts of stress and anger, and it drained my energy. The charges filed against the perpetrators in my case were first-degree rape and incest, both with the highest penalties possible. I reported the abuse to 23 agencies, including the FBI. I reported acts of torture, including attempted drowning (waterboarding), beatings, caging, prostitution via sex trafficking, chaining and gagging, CSAM (child pornography), ritualized abuse, and many others. Most of these types could not be addressed under the law because there were no laws that criminalized and penalized them. Today there are only three US states that have laws specifically against torture.

I do not regret pressing charges because it prepared me to become an advocate for others pursuing justice in a system ill-prepared to address sexual assault, incest, or torture. At the time, there were no laws in Kentucky concerning human trafficking or torture. Sadly, laws have yet to be passed to address these injustices these years later. One thing I have learned in this process, the failure to pass laws to criminalize these gender-based harms is not by omission but by design. The blocking of laws against sexualized violence is institutionalized and supported by patriarchy.

In June of 1992, after a two-year battle, a special prosecutor from the Kentucky Attorney General's Office was assigned to my case, and a governor's warrant was issued to extradite my father from Columbus, Ohio, to Kentucky to stand trial. Upon his arrival back to the United States from Hungary, where my father addressed the Hungarian Parliament concerning their nuclear program, he was found dead at home. Attempts were made to conceal his death, and I could never have his body exhumed for investigation. Several other persons associated with my case and its investigation also ended up dead, including the former mayor, who was killed in a hit and run incident that is unsolved to this day.

Epitaph: I became an abolitionist. At age 36, I completed my undergraduate degree, the only one in my family of origin to do so and began working full time. I later completed my graduate degree at age 47—a Master of Science in social work. I have worked for 25 years in various capacities, including mental health, substance abuse, and in the criminal justice systems seeing all persons released from prison in a five-year period in one of my positions. I lectured at Indiana University for 14 years in the Department of Criminal Justice under Professor Hal Pepensky. In 2005, I was the first co-chair of the Louisville Human Trafficking Task Force. I have given countless presentations in many different venues. I have presented or convened over 30 sessions at The United Nations meetings on the Convention on the Status of Women. I have received numerous awards, but none compare to partnering with other survivors in the fight to address the gender-based violence of prostitution, CSAM, human trafficking, and, ultimately, to call for an end to the demand for exploitation. I have become a strong advocate for the Nordic Model. This law holds the sex buyer (usually a man) accountable by criminalizing him but decriminalizes the victim (usually a woman or child) and provides services for them. Also, there should be recognition and laws against non-state torture so commonly found in the lives of exploited women and girls. I continue all my work today, but I am carving out time to write a book about my life and to work and speak about the possibility of surviving, healing, and thriving. They are not based on sheer luck but on reliable assistance, including housing, counseling, life skill acquisition, health care, access to education and meaningful work, and inclusion in society without victim-blaming.

I am writing and disseminating my account now. There are renewed attempts to hold online perpetrators and the tech companies that provide encrypted and non-encrypted platforms for “companies” and organized crime accountable for knowingly providing these platforms. I know they also offer ongoing live streaming of the torture of children, including infants.

All that I have received in the way of healing is not compensation for what I endured and survived. I am one of the few out of millions of survivors to have had access to healing modalities, higher education (provided by governmental vocational rehabilitation), and access to the criminal justice system. I've also had a secure, safe, and loving relationship with my husband for many years.

But I want more:

- I want to see the perpetrators, whether they are the buyers of women or children in the exploitation of prostitution, held accountable and prosecuted.
- I want the facilitators, producers, and buyers of online CSAM held accountable and prosecuted.
- I want the assets of perpetrators, including bitcoin and cryptocurrencies or other tangible property, seized and held in escrow. Upon the conviction of the preparators, these assets are distributed in the following ways: 50% to survivor-led programs,

30% to legal defense for survivors, and 20% to law enforcement to assist them in combating online exploitation.

- I want the payment methods, such as credit cards used to facilitate the viewing and or purchase of CSAM, to be thoroughly vetted and investigated, including cryptocurrencies that are now fully vested in these exploitations.
- I want to see law enforcement and the courts funded to carry out investigations no matter the socio/political status or wealth of the perpetrators/buyers.
- Most of all, I want the identities of the anonymous buyers, facilitators, and perpetrators revealed. I want the legal charges and prosecutions to be fully transparent and public.

The buyers of child sexual abuse material, prostitution, and other kinds of exploitation fuel all these illegal acts, yet they are hidden with high-tech means and institutionalized anonymity. We must end this by passing the important legislation and gaining support from the general community, the voting community, and the survivors.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jeanette Westbrook, MSSW, is a social worker and human rights activist and defender with over 27 years of experience. As a social worker, I have years of frontline experience working with traumatized clients from around the world, many of whom were victims of war, torture, incest, prostitution, and rape. I have worked for 20 years with people convicted of drug and alcohol offenses, assault, robbery, trafficking, and pimping in Kentucky court-ordered programs. She is the first co-chair of the Louisville, Kentucky, Human Trafficking Task Force and the former president and vice-president of the United Nations Association of USA-Kentucky. She is a member of SPACE International—an international organization advocating for the worldwide adoption of the Nordic Model. She has presented on over 30 panels at the United Nations. She has used her experience as a survivor to advocate for international treaties and policies that facilitate the empowerment of women and girls.

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