

0:11[This talk contains graphic language and descriptions of sexual violence Viewer discretion is advised]

0:15Tom Stranger: In 1996, when I was 18 years old, I had the golden opportunity to go on an international exchange program. Ironically I'm an Australian who prefers proper icy cold weather, so I was both excited and tearful when I got on a plane to Iceland, after just having farewelled my parents and brothers goodbye. I was welcomed into the home of a beautiful Icelandic family who took me hiking, and helped me get a grasp of the melodic Icelandic language. I struggled a bit with the initial period of homesickness. I snowboarded after school, and I slept a lot. Two hours of chemistry class in a language that you don't yet fully understand can be a pretty good sedative.

0:57(Laughter)

0:59My teacher recommended I try out for the school play, just to get me a bit more socially active. It turns out I didn't end up being part of the play, but through it I met Thordis. We shared a lovely teenage romance, and we'd meet at lunchtimes to just hold hands and walk around old downtown Reykjavík. I met her welcoming family, and she met my friends. We'd been in a budding relationship for a bit over a month when our school's Christmas Ball was held.

1:29Thordis Elva: I was 16 and in love for the first time. Going together to the Christmas dance was a public confirmation of our relationship, and I felt like the luckiest girl in the world. No longer a child, but a young woman. High on my newfound maturity, I felt it was only natural to try drinking rum for the first time that night, too. That was a bad idea. I became very ill, drifting in and out of

批注 [Z1]: 萌芽

批注 [Z2]: 圣诞节

批注 [Z3]: 成熟

批注 [Z4]: 朗姆酒

consciousness in between spasms of convulsive vomiting. The security guards wanted to call me an ambulance, but Tom acted as my knight in shining armor, and told them he'd take me home.

批注 [z5]: 痉挛抽搐呕吐

2:07 It was like a fairy tale, his strong arms around me, laying me in the safety of my bed. But the gratitude that I felt towards him soon turned to horror as he proceeded to take off my clothes and get on top of me. My head had cleared up, but my body was still too weak to fight back, and the pain was blinding. I thought I'd be severed in two. In order to stay sane, I silently counted the seconds on my alarm clock. And ever since that night, I've known that there are 7,200 seconds in two hours.

批注 [z6]: 童话

批注 [z7]: 理智的

2:50 Despite limping for days and crying for weeks, this incident didn't fit my ideas about rape like I'd seen on TV. Tom wasn't an armed lunatic; he was my boyfriend. And it didn't happen in a seedy alleyway, it happened in my own bed. By the time I could identify what had happened to me as rape, he had completed his exchange program and left for Australia. So I told myself it was pointless to address what had happened. And besides, it had to have been my fault, somehow.

批注 [z8]: 跛行

批注 [z9]: 疯子

3:23 I was raised in a world where girls are taught that they get raped for a reason. Their skirt was too short, their smile was too wide, their breath smelled of alcohol. And I was guilty of all of those things, so the shame had to be mine. It took me years to realize that only one thing could have stopped me from being raped that night, and it wasn't my skirt, it wasn't my smile, it wasn't my childish trust. The only thing that could've stopped me from being raped that night is the man who raped me – had he stopped himself.

批注 [z10]: 幼稚的信任

4:03TS: I have vague memories of the next day: the after effects of drinking, a certain hollowness that I tried to stifle. Nothing more. But I didn't show up at Thordis's door. It is important to now state that I didn't see my deed for what it was. The word "rape" didn't echo around my mind as it should've, and I wasn't crucifying myself with memories of the night before. It wasn't so much a conscious refusal, it was more like any acknowledgment of reality was forbidden. My definition of my actions completely refuted any recognition of the immense trauma I caused Thordis. To be honest, I repudiated the entire act in the days afterwards and when I was committing it. I disavowed the truth by convincing myself it was sex and not rape. And this is a lie I've felt spine-bending guilt for.

5:07I broke up with Thordis a couple of days later, and then saw her a number of times during the remainder of my year in Iceland, feeling a sharp stab of heavyheartedness each time. Deep down, I knew I'd done something immeasurably wrong. But without planning it, I sunk the memories deep, and then I tied a rock to them.

5:29What followed is a nine-year period that can best be titled as "Denial and Running." When I got a chance to identify the real torment that I caused, I didn't stand still long enough to do so. Whether it be via distraction, substance use, thrill-seeking or the scrupulous policing of my inner speak, I refused to be static and silent.

5:55And with this noise, I also drew heavily upon other parts of my life to construct a picture of who I was. I was a surfer, a social science student, a friend to good people, a loved brother and son, an outdoor recreation guide, and eventually, a youth worker. I gripped tight to the simple notion that I wasn't a bad person. I didn't think I

批注 [Z11]: 空虚

批注 [Z12]: 扼杀

批注 [Z13]: 行为

批注 [Z14]: 钉死

had this in my bones. I thought I was made up of something else. In my nurtured upbringing, my loving extended family and role models, people close to me were warm and genuine in their respect shown towards women. It took me a long time to stare down this dark corner of myself, and to ask it questions.

6:45TE: Nine years after the Christmas dance, I was 25 years old, and headed straight for a nervous breakdown. My self-worth was buried under a soul-crushing load of silence that isolated me from everyone that I cared about, and I was consumed with misplaced hatred and anger that I took out on myself.

7:04One day, I stormed out of the door in tears after a fight with a loved one, and I wandered into a café, where I asked the waitress for a pen. I always had a notebook with me, claiming that it was to jot down ideas in moments of inspiration, but the truth was that I needed to be constantly fidgeting, because in moments of stillness, I found myself counting seconds again. But that day, I watched in wonder as the words streamed out of my pen, forming the most pivotal letter I've ever written, addressed to Tom. Along with an account of the violence that he subjected me to, the words, "I want to find forgiveness" stared back at me, surprising nobody more than myself. But deep down I realized that this was my way out of my suffering, because regardless of whether or not he deserved my forgiveness, I deserved peace. My era of shame was over.

8:07Before sending the letter, I prepared myself for all kinds of negative responses, or what I found likeliest: no response whatsoever. The only outcome that I didn't prepare myself for was the one that I then got – a typed confession from Tom, full of disarming

regret. As it turns out, he, too, had been imprisoned by silence. And this marked the start of an eight-year-long correspondence that God knows was never easy, but always honest. I relieved myself of the burdens that I'd wrongfully shouldered, and he, in turn, wholeheartedly owned up to what he'd done. Our written exchanges became a platform to dissect the consequences of that night, and they were everything from gut-wrenching to healing beyond words.

8:58And yet, it didn't bring about closure for me. Perhaps because the email format didn't feel personal enough, perhaps because it's easy to be brave when you're hiding behind a computer screen on the other side of the planet. But we'd begun a dialogue that I felt was necessary to explore to its fullest. So, after eight years of writing, and nearly 16 years after that dire night, I mustered the courage to propose a wild idea: that we'd meet up in person and face our past once and for all.

9:36TS: Iceland and Australia are geographically like this. In the middle of the two is South Africa. We decided upon the city of Cape Town, and there we met for one week. The city itself proved to be a stunningly powerful environment to focus on reconciliation and forgiveness. Nowhere else has healing and rapprochement been tested like it has in South Africa. As a nation, South Africa sought to sit within the truth of its past, and to listen to the details of its history. Knowing this only magnified the effect that Cape Town had on us.

10:15Over the course of this week, we literally spoke our life stories to each other, from start to finish. And this was about analyzing our own history. We followed a strict policy of being honest, and this also came with a certain exposure, an open-chested vulnerability. There were

gutting confessions, and moments where we just absolutely couldn't fathom the other person's experience. The seismic effects of sexual violence were spoken aloud and felt, face to face. At other times, though, we found a soaring clarity, and even some totally unexpected but liberating laughter. When it came down to it, we did our best to listen to each other intently. And our individual realities were aired with an unfiltered purity that couldn't do any less than lighten the soul.

11:19TE: Wanting to take revenge is a very human emotion – instinctual, even. And all I wanted to do for years was to hurt Tom back as deeply as he had hurt me. But had I not found a way out of the hatred and anger, I'm not sure I'd be standing here today. That isn't to say that I didn't have my doubts along the way. When the plane bounced on that landing strip in Cape Town, I remember thinking, "Why did I not just get myself a therapist and a bottle of vodka like a normal person would do?"

11:55(Laughter)

11:58At times, our search for understanding in Cape Town felt like an impossible quest, and all I wanted to do was to give up and go home to my loving husband, Vidir, and our son. But despite our difficulties, this journey did result in a victorious feeling that light had triumphed over darkness, that something constructive could be built out of the ruins.

12:27I read somewhere that you should try and be the person that you needed when you were younger. And back when I was a teenager, I would have needed to know that the shame wasn't mine, that there's hope after

rape, that you can even find happiness, like I share with my husband today. Which is why I started writing feverishly upon my return from Cape Town, resulting in a book co-authored by Tom, that we hope can be of use to people from both ends of the perpetrator-survivor scale. If nothing else, it's a story that we would've needed to hear when we were younger.

13:05 Given the nature of our story, I know the words that inevitably accompany it – victim, rapist – and labels are a way to organize concepts, but they can also be dehumanizing in their connotations. Once someone's been deemed a victim, it's that much easier to file them away as someone damaged, dishonored, less than. And likewise, once someone has been branded a rapist, it's that much easier to call him a monster – inhuman. But how will we understand what it is in human societies that produces violence if we refuse to recognize the humanity of those who commit it? And how –

13:50 (Applause)

13:52 And how can we empower survivors if we're making them feel less than? How can we discuss solutions to one of the biggest threats to the lives of women and children around the world, if the very words we use are part of the problem?

14:12 TS: From what I've now learnt, my actions that night in 1996 were a self-centered taking. I felt deserving of Thordis's body. I've had primarily positive social influences and examples of equitable behavior around me. But on that occasion, I chose to draw upon the negative ones. The ones that see women as having less intrinsic worth, and of men having some unspoken and symbolic claim to their bodies. These

influences I speak of are external to me, though. And it was only me in that room making choices, nobody else.

14:53When you own something and really square up to your culpability, I do think a surprising thing can happen. It's what I call a paradox of ownership. I thought I'd buckle under the weight of responsibility. I thought my certificate of humanity would be burnt. Instead, I was offered to really own what I did, and found that it didn't possess the entirety of who I am. Put simply, something you've done doesn't have to constitute the sum of who you are. The noise in my head abated. The indulgent self-pity was starved of oxygen, and it was replaced with the clean air of acceptance – an acceptance that I did hurt this wonderful person standing next to me; an acceptance that I am part of a large and shockingly everyday grouping of men who have been sexually violent toward their partners.

15:55Don't underestimate the power of words. Saying to Thordis that I raped her changed my accord with myself, as well as with her. But most importantly, the blame transferred from Thordis to me. Far too often, the responsibility is attributed to female survivors of sexual violence, and not to the males who enact it. Far too often, the denial and running leaves all parties at a great distance from the truth. There's definitely a public conversation happening now, and like a lot of people, we're heartened that there's less retreating from this difficult but important discussion. I feel a real responsibility to add our voices to it.

16:49TE: What we did is not a formula that we're prescribing for others. Nobody has the right to tell anyone else how to handle their deepest pain or their greatest error. Breaking your silence is never



easy, and depending on where you are in the world, it can even be deadly to speak out about rape. I realize that even the most traumatic event of my life is still a testament to my privilege, because I can talk about it without getting ostracized, or even killed. But with that privilege of having a voice comes the responsibility of using it. That's the least I owe my fellow survivors who can't.

17:35The story we've just relayed is unique, and yet it is so common with sexual violence being a global pandemic. But it doesn't have to be that way. One of the things that I found useful on my own healing journey is educating myself about sexual violence. And as a result, I've been reading, writing and speaking about this issue for over a decade now, going to conferences around the world. And in my experience, the attendees of such events are almost exclusively women. But it's about time that we stop treating sexual violence as a women's issue.

18:14(Applause)

18:28A majority of sexual violence against women and men is perpetrated by men. And yet their voices are sorely underrepresented in this discussion. But all of us are needed here. Just imagine all the suffering we could alleviate if we dared to face this issue together.

18:53Thank you.

18:55(Applause)