Jackie’s Story

by Jackie L. Gutschenritter, used with permission

For more of Jackie’s work please see her website, http://www.learninghope.org

I do not have memories of abuse as early as some people. I primarily remember having no boundaries in my house. No door was to be closed. There was to be no private time; not even in the bathroom. My bedroom door was never to be closed. My primary abuser was my father, but he was not the only one.

My grandparents had foster children and one of them, named Michael, taught me a game called the screw. I had no idea what it was, but since the word is a fairly common description of a particular sexual act, it is pretty clear what he encouraged me to do. His brother, Adam, was also a foster child at my grandparents’ home. He also participated in the game.

I think more because I was afraid to get in trouble than anything else, but we found out the boys were moving to a new home and I decided I had to tell my parents about the game we had been playing. I told them both at the same time. Their response was that it was too late to do anything and I should just forget about it. I think this was when my father saw his opportunity and knew he would probably not get caught.

As I said, there were no closed doors in my house. My father, for as long as I can remember, watched me in the shower. He would walk in when I was going to the bathroom. There was no saying, “No.”

My mom got a job to bring in extra money for my sister to go to preschool. She worked at a grocery store on the weekends. It became a Sunday morning ritual that after my mother had left, he would call me into his bed. I do not know how long that went on. My sister, if she woke up, was told to go watch cartoons downstairs. I do not know how long I stayed in his bed; I only remember that he told me to get up when it was time to get ready for church. He did not attend, but my sister and I went to Sunday School.

It was not just at home when he would abuse me. It happened cutting wood, in the backyard, on the way to school. Wherever he felt he could.
The most painful sexual experience I had with my father was the time he raped me with his finger. I remember crying out, but he put his hand over my mouth so my sister could not hear me. Afterward, I got up and went to Sunday School. I’m not sure if the teacher could tell something was wrong, but she asked me if I’d had a tough week at school. Yes, a tough week at school. That was the only reason I could speak.

I always felt bad about accusing my father of childhood sexual abuse. Every survivor feels badly about telling the truth about their abuse. It is scary. And something no one should ever have to report. When I did tell, people, including my mother, told me it could have been worse, because, after all, he never really raped me. It wasn’t rape, rape, whatever that is supposed to mean.

The reality is he did rape me. And even if it could be argued he didn’t, there were so many other touches, glances, and thoughts of his that were inappropriate. No one should ever have that kind of sexual attention from a parent. No one should ever experience unwanted sexual attention of any kind from anyone.

I don’t know why, but I had to tell. I think I was trying to protect my sister. I told my mother. She said she’d talk to him and make him stop. It did stop for a week or two, then he was back at it. Then I told my Girl Scout leader, with my mom at my side. She had just given a talk on inappropriate touching and we thought she would be someone who could help. She did not. Then I told the minister at church. She counseled my parents for eight months before finally calling the police.

The day she called the police, an officer and his wife from another county came to question me. The county I lived in had no resources to handle the situation. The two people questioned me in the living room, while my mother and father sat in the kitchen, within earshot of everything I said. I don’t know where my sister was at that time. After they questioned me, I was sent to my grandmother’s house while they questioned my mom and dad.

Dad had to move out of the house. So where did he go? Two doors down from my house to my grandparents’ house – with the foster kids they had at the time. He stayed there for a while, then someone realized he probably shouldn’t be there with the foster kids. He used to come back to our house every night for dinner, but he didn’t come in the house. One night, he left his dinner plate on top of his truck. It shattered on the ground in a million pieces as he drove away.
He was put on probation and we had family visits twice a week and counseling once week. I was told to apologize to my father for breaking up our family. I did because I didn’t know what else to do. Eventually, he broke probation and abused another girl. She was not related to him, so it was considered a worse crime. He was sentenced to four years for breaking probation and five years for what he had done to the other girl.

The sentences were to be served concurrently so the most he could have served was 5 years, but because his crime was “not that violent” and the prisons were so full, he got two and a half years in prison.

I moved away to school as quickly as I could and tried to go on with my life and pick up the pieces of everything that had been done to me. It took a long time to get to a place I’d call ok. My life is finally on a good trajectory. I can say in the last two years, that for the first time in my life, I genuinely feel happy. Every day isn’t great, but I’m loved and supported and feel like I can truly be me. It’s pretty awesome.