

# R.A.G.E.

## Reflections on Acts of Gendered violence and our Educational lives

by

Laura Wyper

A Thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
For the degree of Master of Arts  
Graduate Department of Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education.  
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OISE / University of Toronto

R.A.G.E

Reflections on Acts of Gendered violence and our Educational lives

Master of Arts

2012

Laura Wyper

Graduate Department of Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education

Abstract

This is an arts-informed qualitative research study looking at violence against women and how it affects their educational outcomes. It uses an art installation in which the narratives of the women involved are combined with photographs and real world objects in which viewers take on a ‘walking meditation’ as well as the use of participation stations for viewer feedback and further sharing of stories anonymously.

This project is based on the belief that through a feminist research lens, participatory practice with the use of storytelling can be a form of transformation in community development.



# Acknowledgments

I would like to thank:

Everyone who attended the art installation showing,  
and the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library –Main Library,  
family, friends and peers,  
my faculty at OISE -especially Shelley Stagg-Peterson, Nancy Jackson,  
Jean-Paul Restoule and Gary Knowles,  
Brian Crowle from StickIt! Digital Design lab for all his wonderful work  
and patience,  
and most importantly:

To the brave women who were willing to share their stories,  
so that others may realize that they are not alone

**\*we can talk about and heal our lives\***

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## How it all began:

I remember the wind was blowing strongly and seemed to whistle a foreboding warning through the pines as I got off the bus and slowly walked up the hill after long hours at the university.

I laughed out loud saying, "I know, I'll be careful," absently.

We all met at a local pub and had a great time laughing, dancing, and generally joking around. At the end of the night I went to my partner's house, only to find him uncommunicative. I provoked an argument in my frustration at his hot and cold behaviour, the other women that had been around, the stacks of pornography, and everything else that I felt was wrong with our relationship in the recent past.



I left, storming down the stairs and out the front door. I only made it to the sidewalk. I was grabbed and tackled to the ground. He was straddled on top of me, hitting me in the face repeatedly. My head kept hitting the sidewalk with each blow. He grabbed me and hauled me up and back into the house. I had a panicky feeling that if he got me inside no one would see me or be able to help me -but I was sorely outmatched by a hundred pounds.



I yelled out his name as loud as I could. I kept repeating his name, and he stopped. When I turned, he saw my head was gushing blood at the back. He told me to come upstairs where there were towels and washcloths; Dead-All We tried to stop the bleeding. He helped me to clean up the blood. I was feeling weak and dizzy. He led me to his room. Everything felt fuzzy. I asked him how bad the cut was as I couldn't see it. He said it wasn't very big. I asked if I should go to the hospital. He said no, that I could wait until morning.

He started making sexual advances. He was taking my clothes off, kissing me. My head hurt. It felt raw. I told him. He told me to get on top of him if I couldn't lie on my back. I was terrified of what would happen if I didn't straddle him so I did. This scene was replayed again in the morning when we woke up.

My head split like an axe. I told him my friend was coming to town and I had to go and meet her. He let me go. Alone, I walked to the bus station, with my winter hat covering my beat up, bruised and bloody head. Everything was very bright and not entirely solid. I had the worse hargover of my life and it wasn't from alcohol.

When my friend arrived, we went back to my place and I excused myself for a shower. I started to feel like the ground was moving sideways. The next thing I remember, I was on the floor. My head was bleeding in two places now as the shower had reopened the original injury. My friend took a look at my head and gasped, "I think I can see your skull. You need to get to the hospital." So, with my very best friend's help, I got into a cab and she took me to the hospital. When the nurse came in and asked me what happened, I lied: I told her I fell. The doctor eventually came and told me he was going to staple my head shut.



Other than my best friend and the man who I thought was my loving partner, no one knew. I couldn't sleep, and had nightmares. I would wake in terror that he had broken into my house, was coming in my window, and was attacking me again. At night, the same man that I was hanging out with in the day was wielding knives and trying to kill me in my dreams. I remember thinking that I could make it until the end of the semester. I would go home. My family would be there and would take care of me. We didn't see much of each other that summer.

I did not go back to the university the following year. I took a few correspondence courses and then stopped, changed gears, and travelled with friends. I left my first undergraduate degree unfinished... I couldn't go back there..... but I eventually went back to another school, another program, and I will be finishing a Masters degree soon...

...and it's taken me twenty years to call it what it was - RAPE AND BATTERY - although not in that order. It was the coercion of sex -in terror of what else he would do if I didn't acquiesce.

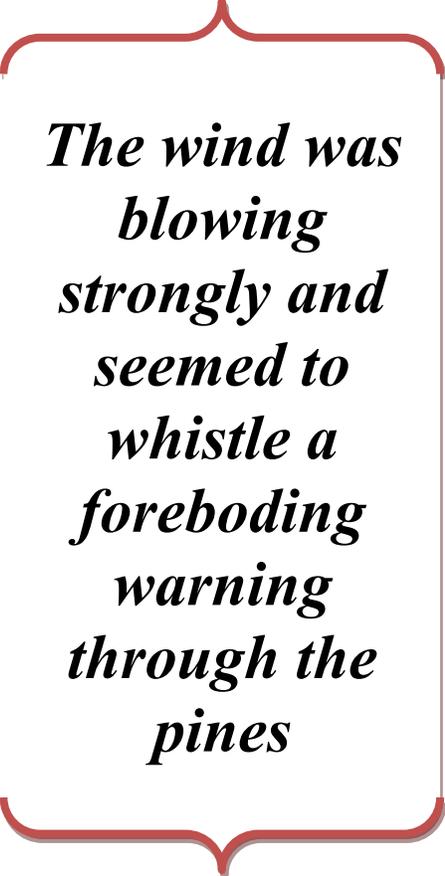


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We all met at a local pub and had a great time laughing, dancing, and generally joking around. At the end of the night I went to my partner’s house, only to find him uncommunicative. I provoked an argument in my frustration at his hot and cold behaviour, the other women that had been around, the stacks of pornography, and everything else that I felt was wrong with our relationship in the recent past.

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through the  
pines*



*When these things happen in public, why doesn't anyone stop? Didn't anyone see this? What about cars going by on the street?  
Already the violence is 'normalized' as he tidies up while she holds her head.*

My head kept hitting the sidewalk with each blow. He grabbed me and hauled me up and back into the house. I had a panicked feeling that if he got me inside no one would see me or be able to help me -but I was sorely outmatched by a hundred pounds.

I yelled out his name as loud as I could. I kept repeating his name, and it worked. He stopped.

I was standing beside him now. I asked what was on the wall, thinking the five guys that lived there were so messy, but it was my own blood.

When I turned he saw my head was gushing blood at the back. My hair was already matting up in it. He told me to come upstairs where there were towels and washcloths, Dead-All.

We tried to stop the bleeding. He helped me to clean up the blood. I was feeling weak and dizzy. He led me to his room. He cleaned up, tidied up, while I sat in a chair with a washcloth held to my head to stop the bleeding.

***I only made it to the sidewalk. I was grabbed and tackled to the ground. He was straddled on top of me, hitting me in the face repeatedly. My head kept hitting the sidewalk with each blow.***



*Did he not want her to go in fear that he would face criminal charges? Is he manipulating her or also in shock at what he's done? What is going through his head at this point?*

Everything felt fuzzy. I asked him how bad the cut was, as I couldn't see it. He said it wasn't very big. I asked if I should go to the hospital. He said no, that I could wait until morning.

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*He started making sexual advances.*

*He was taking my clothes off, kissing me. My head hurt.*

*It felt raw. I told him. He told me to get on top of him if I couldn't lie on my back. I was terrified*

*of what would happen if I didn't straddle him...so I did. This scene was replayed again in the morning when we woke.*



*She's excusing his behavior when she tells her friend.  
This is one of the coping strategies we use when caught  
in violence – we protect the abuser.*

When my friend arrived we went back to my place and I excused myself for a shower. It was hot and soothed my every aching muscle. I touched my head, feeling queasy as I did. My hair was matted again and I couldn't separate it all. I started to feel like the ground was moving sideways. I quickly turned the shower off and stepped out.

*I started to feel like the ground was moving sideways.*

The next thing I remember was my friend knocking on the door asking if I was all right. I was on the floor. My head was up against the tub; my neck was awkwardly bent forward. She looked shocked, wondering what was wrong. She helped me walk back to my room. My head was bleeding in two places now as the shower had reopened the original injury. We closed the door for privacy from my other

*The next thing I remember was my friend knocking on the door asking if I was all right. I was on the floor.*

*My head was bleeding in two places now as the shower had reopened the original injury.*

university roommates as I told her what had happened the night before: that it wasn't bad, that he'd helped me clean up, that we'd made up after.

*She lies to the nurse because she is protecting him –to ultimately protect herself from him.*

*She may also be ashamed to admit what really happened –she doesn't want anyone to think less of her for it.*

My friend took a look at my head and gasped, “I think I can see your skull. The skin is split wide open. I could put my finger down into it past my knuckle if I tried. Your head is also bleeding and cut where you hit the tub. You need to get to the hospital,” she

***My friend took a look at my head and gasped, “I think I can see your skull.”***

said. So, with my very best friend’s help I got into a cab and she took me to the hospital. When the nurse came in and asked me what happened, I lied: I told her I fell. The doctor came eventually and told me he was going to staple my head shut.

Other than my best friend and the

man who I thought was my loving partner, no one knew, until I started to come undone. Then I started talking to my family, and my friends about it - just a few, but just enough.

February became March. During the day we would talk, hang out even, although it wasn’t the same anymore.

I couldn’t sleep, and had nightmares. I would wake in terror

***When the nurse came in and asked me what happened, I lied: I told her I fell.***



*Symptoms of posttraumatic stress, and self-isolating behaviours are common with abuse.*

that he had broken into my house, was coming in my window, and was attacking me again.

At night the same man that I was hanging out with in the day was wielding knives and trying to kill me in my dreams.

I remember thinking that I could make it until the end of the semester. I

would go

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***At night the same man that I was hanging out with in the day was wielding knives and trying to kill me in my dreams.***

I stopped hanging around with our friends as much. I sat at home and read, studied, and waited for the semester to be over.

I was still talking to him a bit, but it was always awkward now. I didn't know what to say, how to act, what to do about it. It was like this huge unspoken space had crept up between us but neither of us were talking about it. He never apologized, never really talked about it at all. It was as if it never happened, except I had my healing and scabby head to remind me.

We didn't see much of each other that summer...

The most common form of violence against women for most groups is dating and domestic violence at the hands of an intimate, known male. UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, states that “Around the world, as many as one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or abused in some other way – most often by someone she knows, including by her husband or another male family member” (2012).

...and it's taken me twenty years to call it what it was -RAPE AND BATTERY- although not in that order.

It was the coercion of sex -in terror of what else he would do if I didn't acquiesce.

★★★★★★★★

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## Numbers with Seven in Them



I had a bad experience growing up, and the person who did it was always around, but I couldn't talk to them about it because I didn't know how. When I was seven my mother went to babysit my cousins for a few hours and I stayed home with my dad. I was playing in my room and went out to the living room to watch TV. My dad was doing some kind of work and I asked him what he was going to make me for lunch, so he made me a sandwich and I had some milk.



Later when I was playing again I saw my dad go to the linen closet and get a bunch of towels out. I asked him what he was doing but he didn't answer. I was in my room then and my dad came in and asked me to follow him into my parents' room. He pushed me down onto the bed, and that's when it all happened. Afterwards, he cleaned up his mess, taking all the towels away and yelled at me not to tell anybody. I was seven. I never trusted him again. I went back to my room and pretended that nothing had happened. I mean, who do you trust in your life once that happens to you?



My dad died when I was twelve. I told my mother what had happened once he was gone. I tried to talk to her about it but she told me to stop making things up about him. For many years I tried to talk to her about it until she would believe me, but she wouldn't. I think that's a big part of why I left home at seventeen. Even before that I would go to my grandma's all the time because I felt safe there. When I was seventeen, when I left, it was because my mother's boyfriend pulled a knife on me in the kitchen. My mom was in bed and he told me to shut my mouth about what was going on in the house, and that I needed to help out more. I felt like I was going to get hurt by him, so I ran upstairs and called my grandma to ask if I could go to her house. I told her what had just happened and she wanted me to call the police but I didn't know how to do any of that. I didn't know what to do, so I left. I stayed back and forth between there and my grandparents' place where I knew I was protected and safe.



In a few weeks the dreams started, but in them it was my dad holding the knife. It was like my mind melted the two things together. I can't look at knives now. Me and knives don't get along. I can't stand seeing them and it doesn't matter what kind of knife it is. The bad dreams come and go at times. A year later, my mom moved on with her life and she met a different guy. They ended up getting married and had a child together. I think after the thing with my dad I felt like kids bugged me at school. They'd say really mean things about me being poor, or how my clothes weren't any good. One time a kid came up to me and said my mom killed my dad. I dropped out of school in grade nine. I think I let things build up with the people bugging me, and what had happened. I tended to go out with a lot older guys and deep down inside I felt like that was wrong. Later, I decided to get my life together and went to some groups that help with self-esteem. When I went back to school in college, I think the different classes and support groups helped. While in college, I saw a counsellor for academics and personal reasons which helped me a lot as well. Going to different placements made me feel better too. Once I graduated with honours, I felt good about myself.

There were groups that helped me learn how to cope better with things in my own way and how to make myself feel better. I also went to some other groups too for people who were abused. That helped too. I find journaling and music really help me. Spending my time with people that I trust helps as well, but only a few friends know what happened. They never looked at me differently. Now I am really working on my education and employment and just taking one day at a time. I wish there were more groups out there to help me, but I can only do so much. I like learning about new tools for my toolbox. I call it my toolbox of knowledge because it's the kind of things that are my insights and strategies to help myself. Journaling really helps heal the mind. I'm thinking of going back to school to be a child and youth worker or a social worker. I like to hear other women's stories. I want to always jump in and help, but I know that they have to help themselves first. My heart breaks when I hear about the different kinds of abuse in the world.





# Numbers with Seven in Them:

I had a bad experience growing up, and the person who did it was always around, but I couldn't talk to them about it because I didn't know how.

When I was seven my mother went to babysit my cousins for a few hours and I stayed home with my dad. I was playing in my room and went out to the living room to watch TV. My dad was doing some kind of work and I asked him what he was going to make me for lunch, so he made me a sandwich and I had some milk.

Later when I was playing again I saw my dad



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*Even now she can't REALLY talk about it  
i.e.) 'when it happened'  
...and that loss of trust can affect her  
relationships -globally*

go to the linen closet and get a bunch of towels out. I asked him what he was doing but he didn't answer. I was in my room then and my dad came in and asked me to follow him into my parents' room.

He pushed me down onto the bed, and that's when it all happened. Afterwards he cleaned up his mess, taking all the towels away and yelled at me not to tell anybody. I was seven.

I never trusted him again. I went back to my room and pretended that nothing had happened. I mean, who do you trust in your life once that happens to you?

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“54% of girls under age 16 have experienced some form of unwanted sexual attention; 24% have experienced rape or coercive sex; 17% have experienced incest” (Holmes & Silverman 1992; Russell 1996).

My dad died when I was twelve. I told my mother what had happened once he was gone. I tried to talk to her about it but she told me to stop making things up about him. For many years I tried to talk to her about it until she would believe me, but she wouldn't.

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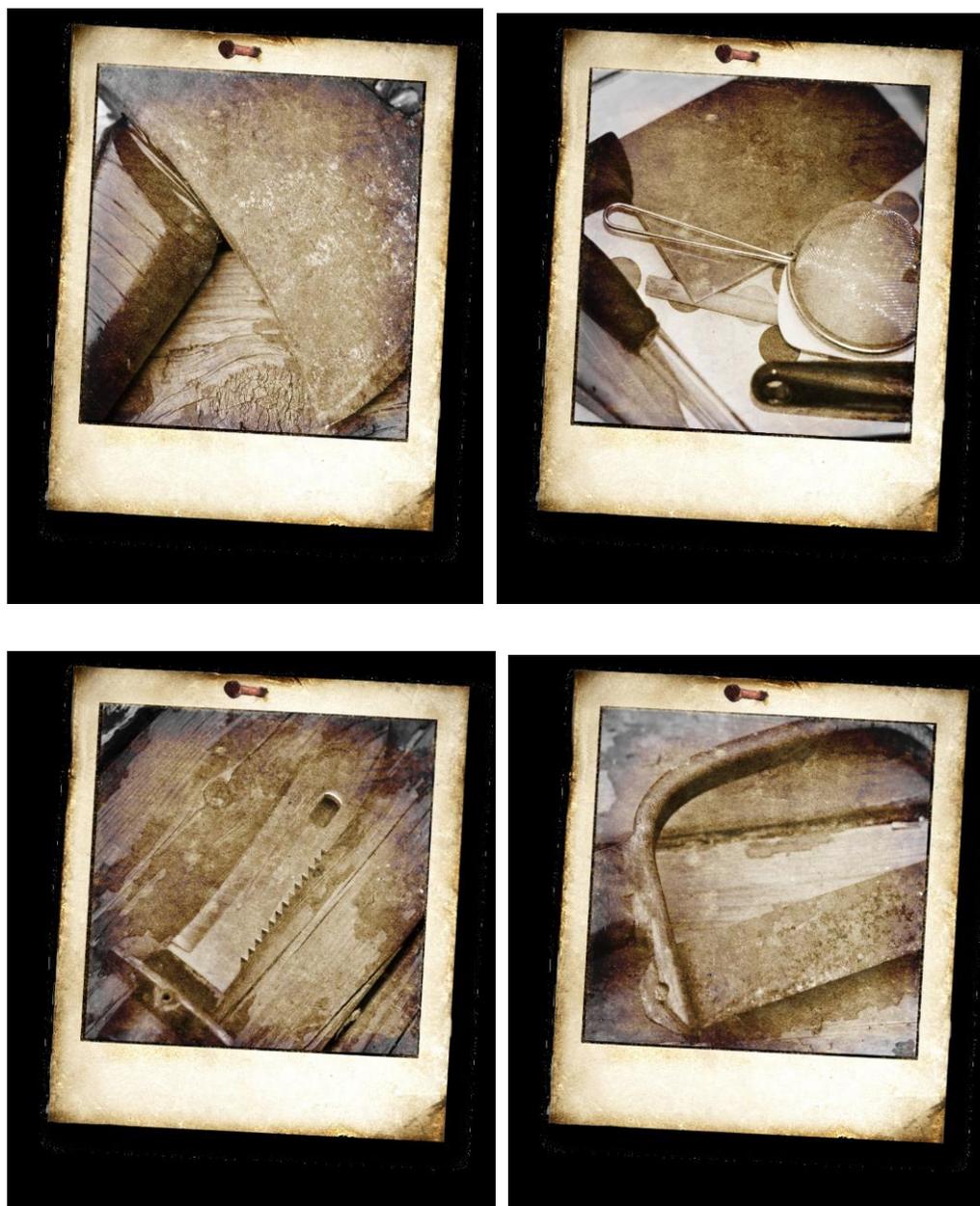
When I was seventeen, when I left, it was because my mother's boyfriend pulled a knife on me in the kitchen. My mom was in bed and he told me to shut my mouth about what was going on in the house, and that I needed to help out more.

I felt like I was going to get hurt by him, so I ran upstairs and called my grandma to ask if I could go to her house. I told her what had just happened and she wanted me to call the police but I didn't

*I mean, who do you trust in your life once that happens to you?*

\*

*I told my mother what had happened once he was gone. I tried to talk to her about it but she told me to stop making things up about him.*



*It seems her mother is in denial, and her daughter needs help.*

*Her brain has now taken the two events and put them together as she experiences post traumatic memories of both –together now.*

know how to do any of that. I didn't know what to do, so I left. I stayed back and forth between there and my grandparents place where I knew I was protected and safe.

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In a few weeks the dreams started, but in them it was my dad holding the knife. It was like my mind melted the two things together. I can't look at knives now. Me and knives don't get along. I can't stand seeing them and it doesn't matter what kind of knife it is.

*...he told me to shut my mouth about what was going on in the house...*

I think after the thing with my dad I felt like kids bugged me at school. They'd say really mean things about me being poor, or how my clothes weren't any good. One time a kid came up to me and said my mom killed my dad. The bad dreams come and go at times.

*I didn't know what to do, so I left.*

A year later my mom moved on with her life and she met a different guy. They ended up getting married and had a child together.



*Leaving school is common. With too much to cope with it's just sometimes easier to stop going; sometimes, maybe later on, school can be part of the solution.*

I dropped out of school in Grade nine. I think I let things build up with the people bugging me, and what had happened. I tended to go out with a lot older guys and deep down inside I felt like that was wrong.

***I dropped out of school in Grade nine.***

Later I decided to get my life together and went to some groups that help with self-esteem. When I went to back to school in college, I think the different classes and support groups helped. While in college I saw a counsellor for academics and personal reasons which helped me a lot as well. Going to different placements made me feel better too. Once I graduated with honours I felt good about myself.

There were groups that helped me to learn how to cope better with things in my own way and how to make myself feel better. I also went to some other groups too for people who were abused. That helped too.

***I think I let things build up with the people bugging me, and what had happened.***



*She's moved into what I call 'survivor mode' as she knows she has to 'do the work' that it will take to get through this. She keeps a 'toolkit' of coping strategies for when life gets hard.*

I find journaling and music really help me. Spending my time with people that I trust helps as well, but only a few friends know what happened. They never looked at me differently.

Now I am really working on my education and employment and just taking one day at a time.

***When I went to back to school in college, I think the different classes and support groups helped.***

I wish there were more groups out there to help me, but I can only do so much. I like learning about new tools for my toolbox. I call it my toolbox of knowledge because it's the kind of things that are my insights and strategies to help myself. Journaling really

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I'm thinking of going back to school to be a

child and youth worker or a social worker. I like to hear other women's stories. I want to always jump in and help, but I know

*She also knows we all have to do 'our work' regardless of what supports are out there –they are just a tools and supports –the real work starts with us.*

that they have to help themselves first. My heart breaks when I hear about the different kinds of abuse in the world.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



## Party Favourite

My mother was a party favourite for bikers and I remember fighting them off of my mother when they were abusing her. Of course, these men were often staying with my mother and I eventually started being abused by them as well. CAS has a file a few inches thick on me that they let me look at when I was fifteen, although they never took me out of there. By the age of five I was telling adults around me what was happening to me but no one did anything. The sexual abuse got a lot worse when I was around eight or nine.



I started to think about suicide, but I told myself I was supposed to be here. I fought with myself a lot on the inside because of it all; then I began to hate my mother. I mean, I was a little kid telling them all that I was having sex with men, and they were adults, and they did nothing.



When I was ten, I was freaking out telling my babysitter about what was going on and she just told me that I had to relax and gave me a joint. At this age, by the age of ten, I had had two yeast infections, a bleeding ulcer and had hit puberty. It was around this age that I kind of lost it. I stood up to my main abuser because I'd begun to menstruate, and he came over to our house. When he approached me I started yelling at him that he couldn't do it anymore; he wasn't allowed. He started shaking me and he held a gun to my head. I remember him hitting me in the head with the gun when I started screaming "What are you going to do, kill me? I'm a little girl!" Later, he asked my mother how ten year old girls menstruate, and that was the first time my mother ever believed me about the abuse. It was around this time that I was standing up for myself when my grades started to slip.



In grade seven my teacher was a pervert and would sit and stare at me all the time, so I stopped going as much. In grade eight I told my teachers about it all and they let me come to school just for tests. I'm not sure if they did anything either though; if they did call CAS nothing was done because I was still with my mom. They gave me a counselor and put me in a parenting class, which is pretty fucked up. It's helped a lot though when I was older and had my own kids. By grade eight my mother was buying cigarettes and alcohol for me and my friends in an attempt to keep me home. Even though I only went to school for mandatory tests at this point I still pulled an 80% average and was told I couldn't go to the Special Ed. School because my grades were too high. I went to grade nine for two weeks. I stopped going because showing up as a lesbian Goth didn't go over too well with the other kids. I was being seriously harassed by the other students so I went back home. Well, I wasn't home much anymore because I was in a relationship with a twenty-one year old. I was thirteen, but sex was nothing to me as I'd been having it for so long with adults. He had a daughter and I fell into that 'fatherly' puppy dog love. I was pregnant at fifteen. My mom kicked me out at this age too and when she invited me back, the guy who'd abused me for years was sitting on



her couch like he was 'waiting' for me. I screamed at her. I mean what the fuck was he doing there! So I left. I stayed with my grandma who taught me how to

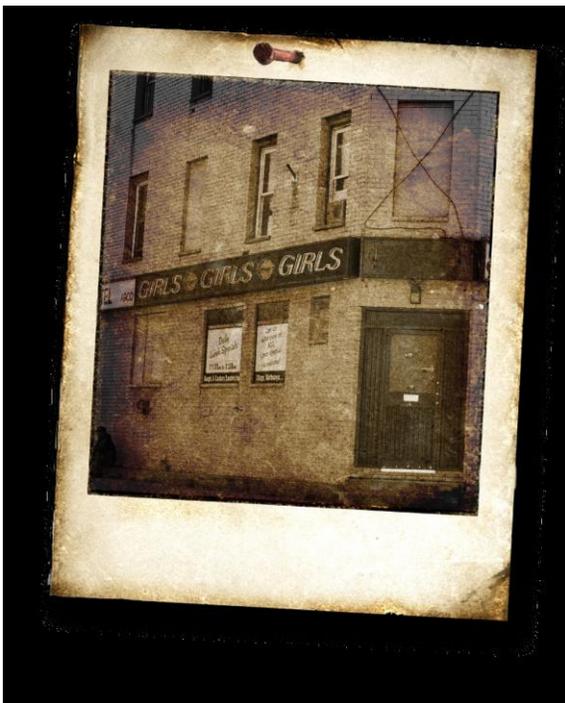
cook and clean because she knew I wasn't learning this from my mom. She was mentally abusive but it was better than anything else I'd ever had. It was my only sanity. I went from partying at my mom's house to partying in the community. My ex-babysitter set me up dealing drugs and I met the father of my two kids. One day I went to the pool and heard little kids talking about the same guy who'd abused me for all those years. They were talking to each other about how they didn't want to go home. I couldn't take it. I freaked out and had to leave because I knew that what had happened to me was now happening to them. This guy was a big property owner in my town and I KNOW that if he was EVER brought up on charges, if his name was EVER in the papers, if someone stood up and named him as their abuser, I KNOW there would be MANY other victims that would stand up. I stayed with a grown man while I was fifteen. I was introduced to a new older guy and became pregnant with my first son, stayed with this person until I was twenty, and had two children. Then I went back to the abusive 'grown man' for another year and a half. He eventually started blaming me for the child abuse that had happened to me, and he started hitting my son. Something clicked in my head at that point.

It was like I realized that I was letting my kid get abused, but in a different way, like I was abused. I left at this point with my kids.



This was the moment when my life changed. I started getting help from different abuse support groups. I was twenty-one at this point. One program called 'Freedom from Abuse' should be in every school. We shouldn't have to wait until we're so ridiculously messed up. Children should know this stuff before it happens or to help them when it might be happening to them. I started really standing up for myself at this point, got a job and thought about school, but I was pregnant again. I wanted to go to school but I needed to wait until I knew what to do. The kids are in school now so I can be too. I also just finally met my real father last year. I went back to an adult ed. program and for three months I studied really hard. I got my GED and I'm presently applying to university. I'm also volunteering in my community a lot with food security and poverty groups.

You know, it's a brutal truth that this stuff happens, but it won't get anywhere if people don't talk about it. Sure it may fuck you up and harm you emotionally BUT it's not catastrophic; you CAN get through it.



## Party Favourite:

My mother was a party favourite for bikers and I remember fighting them off of my mother when they were abusing her. Of course, these men were often staying with my mother and I eventually started being abused by them as well.

CAS has a file a few inches thick on me that they let me look at when I was fifteen, although they never took me out of there.

By the age of five I was telling adults around me what was happening to me but no one did anything. The sexual abuse got a lot worse when I was around eight or nine. I started to think about suicide, but I told myself I was supposed to be here. I fought with myself a lot on the inside because of it all; then, I began to hate my mother.



***My mother was a party favourite for bikers and I remember fighting them off of my mother when they were abusing her. Of course, these men were often staying with my mother and I eventually started being abused by them as well.***



Witnessing domestic assault and the possible risks associated leave impacts ranging from: learning gender roles in relation to violence, to regressive behaviours due to inhibited independence, to distraction leading to decreased learning, to negative coping and avoidance behaviors like drug use, to difficulty establishing healthy relationships and communication, to evoking negative feedback (Baker, & Jaffe, 2006).

I mean, I was a little kid telling them all that I was having sex with men, and they were adults, and they did nothing.

When I was ten I was freaking out telling my babysitter about what was going on and she just told me that I had to relax and gave me a joint. At this age, by the age of ten, I had had two yeast infections, a bleeding ulcer and had hit puberty.

It was around this age, around the age of ten, that I kind of lost it. I stood up to my main abuser because I'd begun to menstruate and he came over to our house. When he approached me I started yelling at him that he couldn't do it anymore; he wasn't allowed. He started shaking me and he held a gun to my head. I remember him hitting me in the head with the gun when I started screaming

“What are you going to do, kill me? I'm a little girl!”

***I began to hate  
my mother. I  
mean, I was a  
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nothing.***



*How any of this was allowed to happen and continue if CAS had files documenting it is beyond me. Is this, like First Nations abuses- another example of the inadequacies of our 'safety nets' that at times they do more harm or nothing at all?*

Later he asked my mother how ten year old girls menstruate, and that was the first time my mother ever believed me about the abuse. It was around this time that I was standing up for myself, when my grades started to slip.

In Grade seven my teacher was a pervert and would sit and stare at me all the time, so I stopped going as much, and in Grade eight I told my teachers about it all and they let me come to school just for tests. I'm not sure if they did anything either though; if they did call CAS nothing was done because I was still with my mom; although they gave me a counselor and put me in a parenting class, which is pretty fucked up. It's helped a lot though when I was older and had my own kids.

By Grade eight my mother was buying cigarettes and alcohol for me and my friends in an attempt to keep me home.

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Child neglect and physical abuse have been linked to peer and dating relationships, in Chiodo et. al. (2011), with a strong link between being mistreated and later victimization (Sanders and Moore, 1999) as well as later violence perpetration (Fang and Corso, 2007).

Even though I only went to school for mandatory tests at this point I still pulled an 80% average and was told I couldn't go to the Special Ed. School because my grades were too high.

I went to Grade nine for two weeks. I stopped going because showing up as a lesbian Goth didn't go over too well with the other kids. I was being seriously harassed by the other students so

I went back home. Well, I wasn't home much anymore because I was in a relationship with a 21 year old. I was thirteen, but sex was nothing to me as I'd been having it for so long with

adults. He had a daughter

and I fell into that 'fatherly'

puppy dog love. I was pregnant at fifteen. My mom kicked me out at this age too and when she invited me back, the guy who'd abused me for years was sitting on her couch like he was 'waiting' for me.

***By Grade eight my mother was buying cigarettes and alcohol for me and my friends in an attempt to keep me home.***

***I went to Grade nine for two weeks... I was being seriously harassed by the other students so I went back home.***

***I was in a relationship with a 21 year old. I was thirteen, but sex was nothing to me as I'd been having it for so long with adults.***



*She is still distraught years later and sobs as she tells me she realized her abuser was a predator in the community and was abusing other children as well.*

I screamed at her. I mean what the fuck was he doing there! So I left. I stayed with my grandma who taught me how to cook and clean because she knew I wasn't learning this from my mom. She

***One day I went to the pool and heard little kids talking about the same guy who'd abused me for all those years.***

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One day I went to the pool and heard little kids talking about the same guy who'd abused me for

all those years. They were talking to each other about how they didn't want to go home. I couldn't take it. I freaked out and had to leave because I knew that what had happened to me was now happening to them. This guy was a big property owner in my town and I KNOW that if

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The experience of child sexual abuse at home can cause sexualized behaviors that then result in an increased risk of revictimization later (Berman et. al. 2000).

he was EVER brought up on charges, if his name was EVER in the papers, if someone stood up and named him as their abuser, I KNOW there would be MANY other victims that would stand up.

I stayed with a grown man while I was fifteen, then at 15 I was introduced to a new older

***I went back to the abusive ‘grown man’ for another year and a half. He eventually started blaming me for the child abuse that had happened to me, and he started hitting my son.***

guy and became pregnant with my first son, and stayed with this person until I was twenty, and had two children. Then I went back to the abusive ‘grown man’ for another year and a half. He

***Something clicked in my head at that point. It was like I realized that I was letting my kid get abused, in a different way, like I was abused. I left at this point with my kids.***

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*She sees the cycle of abuse  
and ends it.*

★★★★★★★★★  
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Something clicked in my head at that point. It was like I realized that I was letting my kid get abused, in a different way, like I was abused. I left at this point with my kids. This was the moment when my life changed. I started getting help from different abuse support groups.

I was twenty-one at this point. One program called ‘Freedom from abuse’ should be in every school. We shouldn’t have to wait until we’re so ridiculously messed up. Children should know this stuff before it happens or to help them when it might be happening to them.

I started really standing up for myself at this point, got a job and thought about school, but I was pregnant again. I wanted to go to school but I needed to wait until I knew what to do. The kids are in school now so I can be too. I also just finally met my real father last year.

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★★★★★★★★★

*I remember feeling numb when this interview was over. I was completely overwhelmed –and I'd only been told the story. That this woman lived through this and is a strong and independent community activist headed to university humbles me.*

I went back to an adult ed. Program and for three months I studied really hard. I got my GED and I'm presently applying to university. I'm also volunteering in my community a lot with food security and poverty groups.

You know, it's a brutal truth that this stuff happens, but it won't get anywhere if people don't talk about it. Sure it may fuck you up and harm you emotionally BUT it's not catastrophic, you CAN get through it.

***You know, it's a brutal truth that this stuff happens, but it won't get anywhere if people don't talk about it.***

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## Sledgehammers and playgrounds

When I was in school anytime I tried to do anything learning wise, or like reading aloud in class, or answering questions, I was picked on. All the other kids would pick on me. If it wasn't by the students then it was by the teachers or principal. I liked a few of my teachers maybe, but really I pretty much didn't like any of it.

With the teachers, if I didn't know something they'd say I should know it in front of the class. If I did poorly on a test, they would announce who did really well and then compare that to me and how I'd done. Stuff like that was really, really hurtful. My classmates picked on me about everything. It didn't matter if I talked or if I didn't talk, if I was involved with the group or not, or how I walked even.



At first it started out as name calling, and then it started to become bullying. Boys and girls would pick on me, beat me up, and stuff. I'd go home with black eyes or marks around my neck from them grabbing me.

One day when I was in grade four I had gone to school, it was probably September or October. When me and my sister walked into the schoolyard about ten to fifteen of my classmates and kids in grades older than me surrounded us. They pushed me up against the wall, and one kid from grade five had a sledgehammer with him. He had a science project or something where he was using it, I think. He threatened to hit me in the head with it. All the other kids were kind of standing around laughing at me, and they were like arguing about where to hit me in the head. They wouldn't leave me. I remember hearing the school bell ring as they were chasing me. I saw my best friend and ran up to her. I grabbed her and we ran to the office to tell them. The principal said the student didn't realize what he was doing. Nothing was done about it.



I didn't want to go to school. I'd pretend I was sick, I'd make myself throw-up, I'd start freaking out, or I'd cause big arguments so I'd be late. I would diddle-diddle or hide in the schoolyard so they wouldn't find me. I'd try to get there just before the bell rang and didn't involve myself in too much. High school was better. I loved high school. I aced everything and they wanted to move me to a different school that was harder. I stuck up for myself and had attitude, like, a really bad attitude problem. I think in high school I almost became a bully.

It was bad. I think just the stress of the years of being picked on, I just couldn't take it anymore. I figured the new start would, you know, be a change around in life, and it was. In high school I was snarky and if someone said something to me I'd say something back, or I would chase them down the hall, or you know, be the bully like how I was bullied in grade school.



But then one day, we were sitting there and there were a couple of kids that I went to school with who had disabilities. I had noticed that a few other kids were picking on them, and just

looking at the person and remembering how it felt, well it all kind of clicked in and I stopped them from bullying them. I stuck up for them and yelled "They don't do that, you know it's wrong!" Then I sat there and thought: Oh my GOD! I've also been doing that for almost the whole school year. I realized it was so wrong of me and that was the end of that. Then the grade ten thing was going good until I had some family troubles, and it kind of just went downhill from there. I dropped out in the first week of grade eleven. There was a lot of fighting at home so I just wasn't into it, and I was sixteen too so I left home. Well, I had left home, or started trying to leave home when I was thirteen actually. Then I was finally gone by the time I was sixteen. Right out, right as soon as I turned sixteen I was gone.



I tried to go back to school when I was sixteen right after I dropped out. I had gone to a different adult ed. school but it was brutal with no help so I ended up dropping out of there. I go to a different school now and would like to get my grade twelve, go to college, and get a nice job. I went back to school to get my grade twelve.

It depends on the kind of school you go to. Some schools will tolerate bullying and let it slide past, you know, but they need to stop that and encourage learning.



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*I was picked on; all the other kids would pick on me. If it wasn't by the students then it was by the teachers or principal.*



*She seems to feel like she is being persecuted and bullied by everyone.*

At first it started out as name calling, and then it started to become bullying. Boys and girls would pick on me, beat me up, and stuff. If I went to school in a new outfit they'd push me I the mud or ruin it in some way. I'd go home with black eyes or marks around my neck from them grabbing my shirt and twisting; my necklace cut my neck once like this.

One day when I was in grade four I had gone to school, it was probably September or October, and when me and my sister walked into the school yard about ten to fifteen of my

classmates and kids in grades older than me surrounded us. They pushed me up against the wall, and one kid from grade five had a sledgehammer with him. He had a science project or something where he was using it I think. He threatened to hit me in the head with it. All the other kids were kind of standing around laughing

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*She seems to feel the threat of the group and their pack mentality. Even years later, she cries as she recounts this traumatic time.*

at me, and they were like arguing about where to hit me in the head. They wouldn't leave me. I tried to get my sisters help but she couldn't understand what was happening.

While they were arguing about where to hit me I saw an opening, so I ran, and I remember hearing the school bell ring as they were chasing me. I saw my best friend and ran up to her; I grabbed her and we ran to the office to tell them. I just started crying and she was trying to ask me what was wrong with me.

The principal said that the student didn't realize what he was doing. Nothing was done about it.

These kinds of things happened to me a lot at school. When my parents bought me something or I got hand-me-downs from friends if someone liked it

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\*

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\*

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Girls ages 9 to 15 are also experiencing significantly high levels of sexual harassment. Percentages are as high as 80 to 81%, and many of these girls have admitted to sexual harassment and unwanted sexual attention that is happening daily (Berman et. al. 2000).

Many girls also experience other forms of violence like put-downs, name calling, and demeaning comments (Berman et. al. 2000).

They'd just take it from me and I would lose my possessions. I didn't want to go to school. I'd pretend I was sick, I'd make myself throw-up, I'd start freaking out and causing big arguments so I'd be late for school. I would diddle-daddle or hide in the school yard so they wouldn't find me. I'd try to get there just before the bell rang and didn't involve myself in too much.

***I didn't want to go to school. I'd pretend I was sick, I'd make myself throw-up...***

High school was better. It was different. The name calling and picking on me stopped. Nobody teased me in high school. Well, for a little while they did when I first went. There were some guys that would always call me names because I was so skinny. At first it really hurt my feelings and I had gone up to them and told them to stop because it was hurting my feelings. They stopped but I had kinda gotten

***...I'd start freaking out and causing big arguments so I'd be late for school.***

***I would diddle-daddle or hide in the school yard so they wouldn't find me.***

used to them doing it all the time, and it was kind of like a little fun thing, so I told them if they wanted to still call me that

“... put-downs and demeaning remarks in the context of dating were often tolerated as a way to ‘keep’ boyfriends”  
(Berman et. al. 2000).

In the process the normalization of the various forms of violence happens. Girls learn to diminish it, ‘take it and keep quiet’, internalize it or retaliate with aggressive measures (Berman et. al. 2000).

that they could, just not too often or whatever, like very day, but like you know it was kinda like a little joke of a thing.

I loved high school. I aced everything and they wanted to move me to a different school that was harder. I stuck up for myself and had attitude, like, a really bad attitude problem.

*I think in high school I almost became a bully. It was bad;*

I think in high school I almost became a bully. It was bad; I think just the stress of the years of being picked on, I just couldn't take it anymore. I figured the new start would, you know, be a change around in life, and it was.

Now I think about the things that happened in

high school, and I'm a totally different person from that. I'm totally different. In high school I was snarky and if someone said something to me I'd say something back, or I would chase them down the hall, or you know, be the bully like how I was bullied in grade school.

But then one day we were sitting there and there were a couple of kids that I went to school with

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who had disabilities. I had noticed that a few other kids were picking on them, and just looking at the person and remembering how it felt, well it all kind of clicked in and I stopped them from bullying them. I stuck up

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for them and yelled “hey don’t do that, you know it’s wrong!”

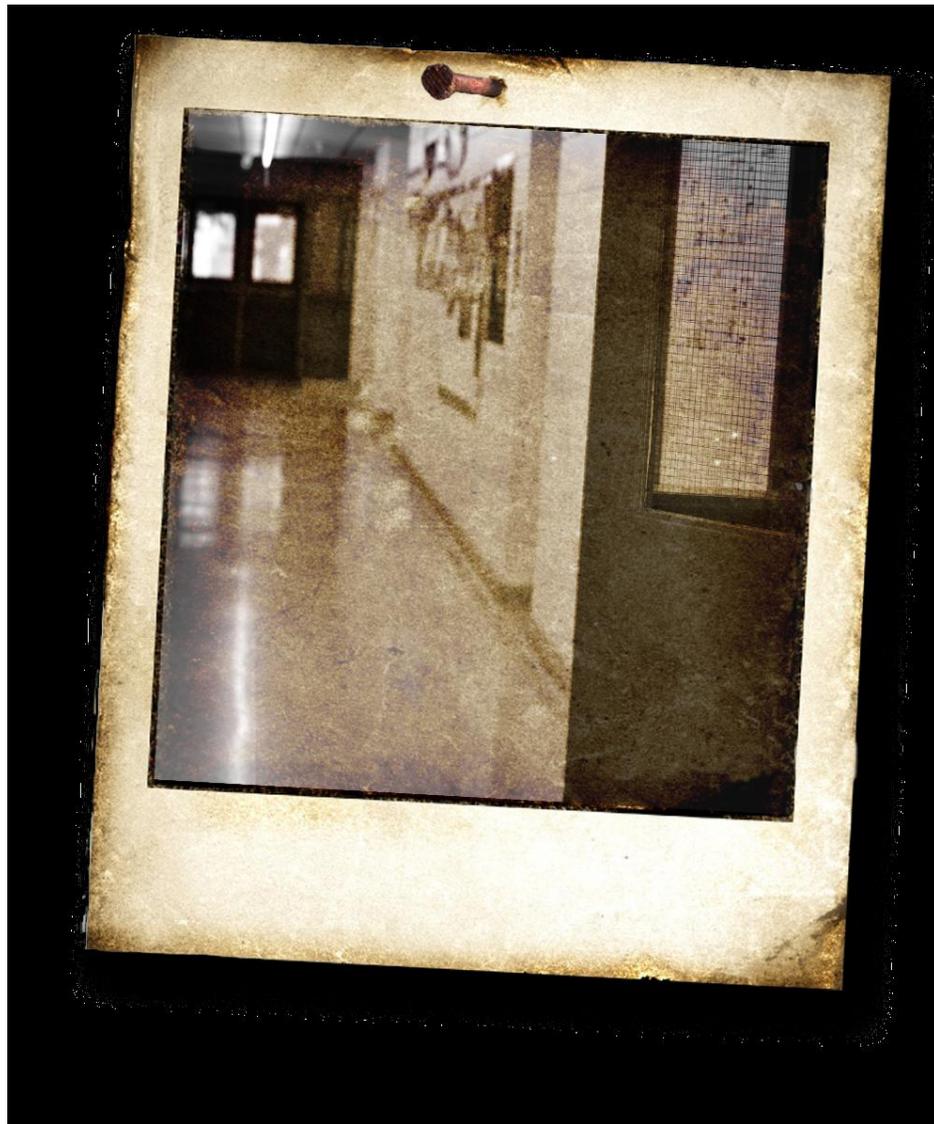
Then I sat there and thought Oh my GOD I’ve also been doing that for almost the whole school year. I realized it was so wrong of me

***Then the grade ten thing was going good until I had some family troubles... I dropped out in the first week of grade eleven.***

and that was the end of that.

Then the grade

ten thing was going good until I had some family troubles, then it kind of just went downhill from there. I



*Like so many others, there is simply too much going on for her to cope with it all. And like others, there is no room for school amidst it all, so she drops out.*

dropped out in the first week of grade eleven. It was partially related to what was going on at home and partly because of school.

There was a lot of fighting at home so I just wasn't into it, and I

★★★★★★★★★★

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I tried to go back to school when I was sixteen right after I dropped out. I had gone to a different adult ed. school but it was brutal with no help so I ended up dropping out of there. I go to a different school now and would like to get my grade twelve, go to college, and get a nice job. I went back to school to get my grade twelve. It depends on the kind of school you go to, some schools will tolerate bullying and let it slide past, you know, but they need to stop that and encourage learning.

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### SickKids.....and sick kids

When I was in school, I had my ups and downs because I was in a major car accident. I got picked on a lot, so there were some days when I didn't really like going to school. In elementary school I was picked on because I was different compared to everybody else. I couldn't do a lot of physical things, like playing sports. I was back and forth to Toronto to SickKids Hospital a lot of times. It made it kind of difficult being different.

I was also coming from Quebec to Ontario and the French language was a little bit different. I find that Quebec French is more slang than Canadian French. I went to a French school until I was fifteen years old in high school. I did one year at one school then transferred. The second school was a lot better because all of the kids that used to pick on me growing up weren't there. They were at the first school. I also found that the second school helped me a lot more with my learning disabilities, especially math. They were patient and they also always knew if something was wrong. When I went to the French high school it was hard to get up in the morning because I had to get up earlier and had a lot of travelling to do to get there. When I went to the English high school it was right around the corner so that made a big difference, and I had a bit more free time.



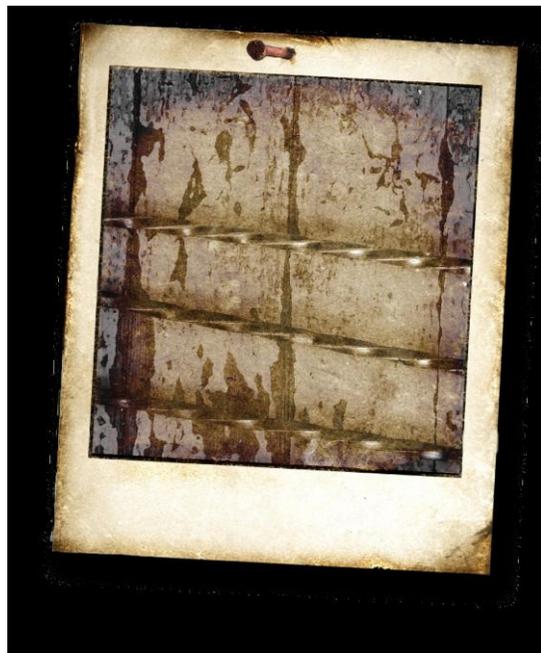
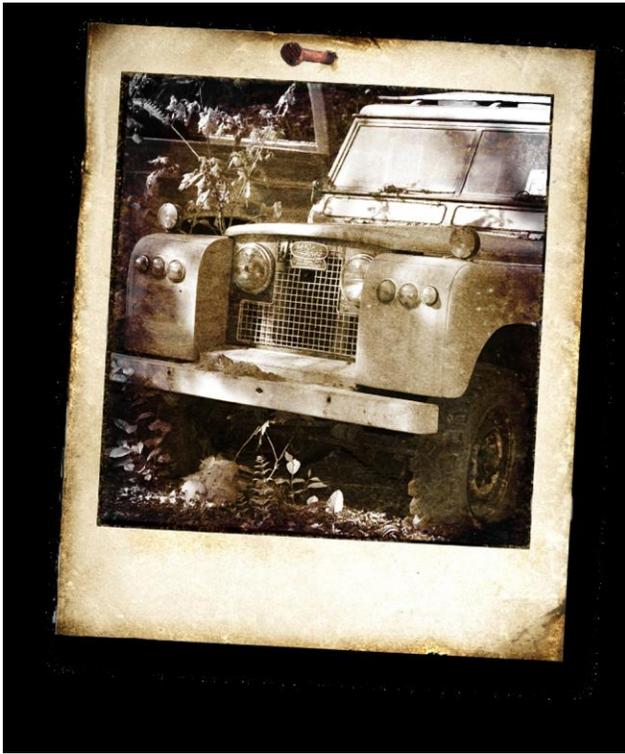
I didn't finish school though. There were some struggles, mainly at home. I moved out when I was seventeen. It didn't have anything to do with school really.

It mainly had to do with what was going on in my life at home. I didn't have good concentration because I was going back and forth to Sick-Kids and had to go through surgeries, plus I was being abused at home so my concentration wasn't up to par, the way it should be.



I came back to adult ed, because I feel that I should have my grade twelve diploma in order to achieve my goals or get ahead in life. I believe education is one of the main priorities, to be able to achieve goals. I can concentrate and not have to worry about what's going on now. I feel like I'm getting my things done that I need to get done. I get up, and get to school. I try to keep my head open and get my work done so I can get my grade twelve diploma. I'm doing better now than I ever did before with my learning. I'm re-reading things, and trying to clarify the questions in order to do my best.





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I couldn't always do what all the other kids were doing, like basketball or other sports. I had rods in my back, pins in my legs, and things.



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...the rate of sexual abuse for girls with disabilities is quadruple that of the national average (Razack 1994).



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*Even now, she's trying to change but her life is getting in the way. Issues of poverty, child care and an abusive spouse mean we rarely see her in the classroom.*

I didn't finish school though. There were some struggles, mainly at home. I moved out when I was seventeen. It didn't have anything to do with school really. It mainly had to do with what was going on in my life at home. I didn't have good concentration because I was going back and forth to SickKids and had to go through surgeries, plus I was being abused at home so my concentration wasn't up to par, the way it should be.

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## Fragmented Reflections



I have strange fragments of what seem to be memories from the time I was a small child up until around eight. They're almost like dream memories. I don't even know if they are real or not, or who is involved. I have a memory of wandering around my childhood neighbourhood naked as a four year old. This isn't a cute little 'running through the sprinkler' kind of memory, but one in which I was 'wandering lost, and dazed' until found by an adult. This memory includes me suddenly 'waking up' lying on the ground at the local park on the cement slab at the beginning of it. In the dream memory, there is the shadow of a much larger person looking down on me, but the sun is behind them so they are just a dark silhouette. I have had this memory since being around four years old and the 'face' has never come to me, but I always get a very uncomfortable, sick feeling when I remember. I don't know why, or if it's even real.



When I was small, my father was an abusive alcoholic. I remember always trying to avoid him when he was angry.

I remember running in terror to hide behind my mother for protection. I remember her yelling and crying too. I have memories of my father's rampages against my mother, and her crying, telling my father not to beat my sister or me, while sobbing. I fear that maybe I've blocked some terrible things I remember my sister standing in the hall with this look of fear and abandonment while I was rushed away to my room. Did he take my sister to their bedroom? Did he ever take me? Why do I have these memories that are so fragmented yet I don't remember anything? Why would my mind make them up? Would it? Or are these scattered shards just that - shards of a life that was shattered somehow?



I have a clearer memory of when I was seven and soon to be eight. I remember my father coming home late one night in a rage of alcohol. I remember a lot of screaming and yelling. My mother was thrown around in front of my sister and I. I remember we were screaming, terrified at what we were seeing as she hit the wall beside us and crumpled to the floor. At some point that night, bruised and beaten, she gathered my sister and I up and we all huddled on my double bed. She had locked us into the bedroom until morning. Now, as an adult I realize she was keeping us safe until he sobered up.



He left soon after this and came in and out of my life a bit. I know if there is more to this story or not. I've been skittish in the years after. I don't know if there is more to this story or not. I've been skittish and shy around men for most of my life. I wasn't ever comfortable around male teachers or principals. It was always hard for me to be around them, around any men really. It made it hard to learn in school because I was scared of many of them. My grade nine math teacher made me so uncomfortable, it was like he was breathing down your neck. He was way, way too close to my body. I had another male teacher in grade ten math that was so 'grumpy' and 'gruff' with everyone, and I remember being so afraid to go to his class. He made you kind of feel like you were a nobody - just a silly girl who couldn't do math anyways - he'd get so impatient and then that would just make me more skittish and scared to ask, or even be able to think.



I was really good at math when I was in elementary school. I even helped the other kids, but I had these weird and scary math teachers in grade nine and ten and I could barely ask for help if I needed it. A lot of times I would just sit there and try to be invisible. I remember having a hard time breathing even. Now that I'm older I'm sure I was having kind of anxiety and it definitely affected my schooling. I would have gone on to something more technical if my math grades hadn't dropped to nearly failing marks, and yet today I'm pretty good at math. I really think it was just the environment. I think as a shy and anxious young girl who was uncomfortable around men, and was also going through puberty, I think this combination, with my family history was pretty bad for me. ...there should be more female teachers in those kinds of subjects so we feel more like we can do them.





# Fragmented Reflections:

I have strange fragments of what seem to be memories from the time I was a small child up until around the age of eight. They're almost like dream-memories. I don't even know if they are real or not, or who is involved.

I have a memory of wandering around my childhood neighborhood, naked as a four year old. This isn't a cute little 'running through the sprinkler' kind of memory, but one in which I was 'wandering lost, and dazed' until found by an adult. This memory includes me suddenly 'waking up' lying on the ground at the local park on the cement slab at the beginning of it. In the dream-memory there is the shadow of a much large person looking down on me, but the sun is behind them so they are just a dark silhouette. I have had this memory since being around four years old and the 'face' has never come to me, but even now I feel physically sick when I think of it.

*I have had this memory since being around four years old and the 'face' has never come to me, but I always get a very uncomfortable, sick feeling when I remember. I don't know why, or if it's even real.*



*What is this fragmentation of memory? Is it a child's way of trying to forget? Are the memories 'leaking' out anyways?*

*The physical symptoms that go with this make me feel like it has to be real...I don't understand it, but have heard of this sort of 'forgetting' before.*

When I was small my father was an abusive alcoholic. I remember always trying to avoid him when he was angry. I remember running in terror to hide behind my mother for protection. I remember her yelling and crying too.

I have memories of my father's rampages against my mother, and her crying, telling my father to take my sister not me, while sobbing. I don't know what this means, and fear that maybe I've blocked some terrible things. I remember my sister standing in the hall with this look of fear and abandonment while I was rushed away to my room. Did he take my sister to their bedroom? Did he ever take me? Why do I have these memories that are so fragmented yet I don't remember anything? Why would my mind make them up? Would it? Or are these scattered shards just that –shards of a life that was shattered somehow?

I have a clearer memory of when I was seven and soon to be eight. I remember my father coming home late one night in a rage of alcohol. I remember a lot of screaming and yelling. My mother was thrown around

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Statistics show that close to 40% of women who were assaulted had children witness the event (Statistics Canada, 2006)

in front of my sister and I. I remember we were screaming, terrified at what we were seeing as she hit the wall beside us and crumpled to the floor.

At some point that night, bruised and beaten, she gathered my sister and I up and we all huddled on my double bed. She had locked us into the bedroom until morning. Now, as an adult I realize she was keeping us safe until he sobered up.

He left soon after this and came in and out of my life a bit in the years after. I don't know if there is more to this story or not. I've been skittish and shy around men for most of my life.

This carried over into school. I wasn't ever comfortable around male teachers or principals. It was always hard for me to be around them, around any men really. It made it hard to learn in school because I was scared of many of them. It made it hard to think.

My grade nine math teacher made me so uncomfortable; it was like he was breathing down your neck. He was way, way too close to my

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body. I had another male teacher in Grade ten math that was so ‘grumpy’ and ‘gruff’ with everyone, and I remember being so afraid to go to his class. He made you kind of feel like you were a nobody –just a silly girl who couldn’t do math anyways –he’d get so impatient and then that would just make me more skittish and scared to ask, or even be able to think.

*I’ve been skittish and shy around men for most of my life.*

I was really good at math when I was in elementary school. I even helped the other kids, but I had these weird and scary math teachers in Grade nine and ten and I could barely ask for help if I needed it. A lot of times I would just sit there and try to be invisible. I remember having a hard time breathing even. Now that I’m older I’m sure I was having some kind of anxiety, and it definitely affected my schooling.

*I wasn’t ever comfortable around male teachers or principals.*

*He made you kind of feel like you were a nobody – just a silly girl who couldn’t do math. anyways.*

I would have gone on to something more technical if my math grades hadn’t dropped to nearly failing marks, and yet today I’m pretty good at math –I really think it was just the environment. I think as a shy and anxious young girl who was uncomfortable around men,



*She shows how role models and safe environments are crucial for learning –for everyone.*

***I would have gone on to something more technical if my math grades hadn't dropped to nearly failing marks, and yet today I'm pretty good at math –I really think it was just the environment.***

of my life.

and was also going through puberty, I think this combination, with my family history was pretty bad for me....there should be more female teachers in those kinds of subjects so we feel more like we can do them.

It's sad to think I got all tangled up inside over it all. It really affected how I related to others, especially males, for most

***I think this combination, with my family history was pretty bad for me....there should be more female teachers in those kinds of subjects so we feel more like we can do them.***



### Last Thoughts...



"Violence against women is one of the most pervasive human rights abuses. It is also one of the most hidden. It takes place in intimate relationships, within the family, and at the hands of strangers and it affects women in every country in the world" (Amnesty International, 2007).



Teachers need to understand violence against women in terms of the signs and symptoms in students, including how it affects learning and communication. We need to know about the referral processes, and the counselling that is available in our communities for students, as well as for the parents of younger students.

We also need to ensure that we are not a part of the problem as:

One of the more insidious ways that marginalization and relative social powerlessness get reinforced and further entrenched is through the mainstream tendency to deny any social responsibility for producing the very conditions producing this marginalization and powerlessness, while simultaneously holding those so affected responsible for their own situation (Haskell, & Randall, 2009).

Through the telling of our stories:

"We expose the assumptions, contradictions, and paradoxes of everyday life" (Ledwith & Springett, 2010).

As such truths are heard, they will hopefully increase our ability to respond at the personal, interpersonal, and community level in ways that are more 'response-able'.



...for you:

If you would like to contribute to this collection of truths by sharing your feelings about the installation or sharing your own story anonymously, please go to one of the 'participation stations' in the room.

Thank-you



# Last Thoughts.....

Violence against women is one of the most pervasive human rights abuses. It is also one of the most hidden. It takes place in intimate relationships, within the family, and at the hands of strangers and it affects women in every country in the world (Amnesty International, 2007).

Teachers need to understand violence against women in terms of the signs and symptoms in students, how it affects learning, and communication. We need to know about referral processes, as well as counselling that is available in our communities for students as well as for the parents of younger students. We also need to ensure that we are not a part of the problem as:

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We can also decrease violence, marginalization, and other issues through participatory practice and the use of story as transformation in community development as:

“Stories create the way we see our place in society and the way we perceive it as molded around us: telling us what to expect of each other and ourselves. They shape and make sense of our world by reiterating the social and political order” (Bolton, 2005:108, as cited in Ledwith & Springett, 2010).

As such they can maintain the status quo OR create counter narratives that steer us towards transformation. (Ledwith & Springett, 2010). Stories also help us to heal as the telling and retelling of our stories can increase our self-esteem. If we are not heard or respected we can feel demeaned, but when we are heard respectfully and with attention it can become the beginning of the process of personal empowerment (Ledwith & Springett, 2010).

We must start with our own identities and the history it is constructed in to become self-critical. This, in turn, becomes the basis for transcending boundaries of ‘race’, class, gender, culture, nationhood, sexual orientation, ‘dis’ability, etc. (Ledwith & Springett, 2010).

“Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance and heals, that makes life and new growth possible. It is the act of speech, of ‘talking back’, that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice” (Hooks, 1989:9).

It is the difference between having things done to us versus taking action. In this process we see other people’s truths. In dialogue and connection, we suspend our own truth in an attempt to understand other people’s truths, and through this are able to move towards a collective narrative and knowing, as well as “...a consensus on experience lived that embraces a diversity of voices” (Ledwith & Springett, 2010). “We expose the assumptions, contradictions and paradoxes of everyday life [...and thus...] We see the world in different ways, and we act in different ways” (Ledwith & Springett, 2010).

This understanding is the power needed to use story as a transformative tool. Our narratives become the “...oppositional responses to dominant narratives...” (Ledwith & Springett, 2010), as we begin to speak up, speak out, fight back or make change. “In this sense, theory and practice form a symbiotic unity, a living praxis, knowledge in action and action as knowledge” (Reason, 2002, as cited in Ledwith & Springett, 2010).

This thesis is an example of the use of story for transformation of practice at the local level. The pieces represented in the earlier pages are from banner panels that were part of an art installation titled R.A.G.E. that was displayed in July 2012 at the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library. The narratives and images emerged from research conducted with women who felt violence in their lives directly affected their educational outcomes. The research project had its beginnings in one of my master's program courses. After doing some brief interviews for a course I was surprised to find that 85-90% of the adult education students I'd interviewed (18 out of 21) had disclosed issues of abuse as part of why they did not like school, and at times why they did not finish. It was at this point that my Masters' thesis chose me: as a previous health care professional who had seen, heard and been exposed to violence in my own life the fact that it was also becoming an obvious factor in student success registered with the feminist and advocate inside me. At that point I decided that I would pursue this in more detail to both decrease isolation of women in literacy programs who were struggling or had struggled with violence as well as to increase literacy practitioners' understandings of the issues learners were grappling with every day through the telling of these women's truths. As Suominen states, "My research is driven by my need to understand the connections between theories, practice, and personal life..." (2007, pp.63).

All of the women involved in the project actively sought out participation, and during interviews repeatedly shared the view that telling our stories was important for actions to ensue: for other women, for learning centres, and for society.

The idea of an arts-informed qualitative research study was important to me. As a researcher my “...challenge [was] to find ways to make participants’ voices heard, to let their individuality show and shine, to make their stories sound loudly” (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Because the manner of telling and framing are important in relation to analysis and meaning making (Cole & Knowles, 2001) I wanted to jump straight into the stories rather than explain and put my own lens on them as may happen with an introduction or prologue.

As someone who is a visual learner and believes in the ability to use art to reach people in profound ways that paper and pen cannot always do alone, this led me to choosing the six foot tall banners that would incorporate both visuals, through pictures, and graphic design as well as the women’s stories on parchment type paper. The pictures would form their own relationship with the text, representing another way of knowing or telling of these stories (Suominen, 2007). My own philosophical leanings meant that I would make this into a very reflective piece that would work like a walking meditation. As viewers walked through the gazebo structure (both inside and around the outside) they would have to take the time to read and really look at all the details

from photos to the real world objects like the women (mannequin) half buried under bottles and boxes of alcohol, textbooks, and medical equipment that was obviously used to deal with her assault. The hope was that they would have an almost physical reaction through this process and really feel and hear the stories, rather than just read them – that it would be a full bodied experience rather than just a mental exercise.

### Who Was Involved

In this installation I worked with women in literacy centres who felt violence in their lives had had a direct effect on their educational outcomes (See Appendix A for pictures of the art installation). The women in the study ranged from 18 to over 40 years of age. As a woman who also had experienced violence that directly affected my own schooling, and coming from feminist perspectives, I included my own story in the work. Two of the women from the first course's interviews came forward and their stories were included in the installation and the thesis.

### How it Happened

Each woman told their stories; they were recorded and written in narrative form by me, then given back to each woman individually to edit and change -ensuring it was still her story. The use of a first person voice was used for each story to give power and presence to the participants' words (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

I then added photographs I had taken to highlight the story. These were formatted onto six-foot high banners with the narratives and real world objects for a public art installation, with the technical help of my partner, local graphic artist Brian Crowle from Stick it! Digital Design Lab. As discussed above, this installation's viewing took place at the local library. It was a walking meditation through the gazebo structure, with viewers led through the installation by graphic footprints laid on the floor guiding them through the inner display, surrounded by barbed wire, out and around the outer display.

It was both a walking meditation for viewers and a chance for further viewer participation as stations were set up for any viewer to share their feelings or their own stories anonymously [although many shared stories during the installation, only one signed a consent form and thus they were not included]. The women's stories in the thesis were combined with further research on gendered violence to ground the personal within the larger framework of violence against women as it happens across demographics, and is still one of the most hidden and yet most common occurrences in the lives of women globally.

In the stories they shared for this project, the women question everyday narratives including: that it is 'laziness', or 'apathy' that 'they just don't care' that stops women from attending or completing school.

Their counter narratives showed that it was instead: rape / incest, extreme bullying, domestic violence, addictions as coping mechanisms,

and other issues of violence that were more often the true reasons for lack of attendance or completion of schooling.

Even though there are only a handful of stories shared they stand to represent, as shown through the supporting research in the thesis, the common beliefs and acceptance of violence as normal in the lives of women. A few of the women who participated came to the showing and talked about how important it was to get this message out. Other viewers also stated that this installation should be shown in colleges and universities, churches and other literacy centres. Some viewers talked about how they were left with a very physical reaction when reading the stories, while others talked about how important it is to know you aren't alone, and it's not okay that these things are happening.

The unquestioned 'everyday' narratives hold society and individuals in a state of paralysis, unable and unwilling to move from these premises. Through the unchallenged narratives silence perpetuates the marginalization and violence, and educators and service providers become a part of the problem. Their silence is a form of support for violence, and thus becomes a further form of violence that victims must bear. Victims are further victimized through the labels that are thrown on them rather than recognition that their actions are symptoms and coping mechanism to deal with the violence in their lives.

What I found or believe now, because of this process is that decreasing abuse means that all service providers be stronger and more

knowledgeable, that we're non-judgmental, and that we speak up and reach out when we suspect something is not right. We need to become leaders in our communities in terms of being able to offer supports and information regarding resources in our communities that may be needed. We need to respond when the students in our classrooms and the people in our neighbourhoods are showing signs of distress.

As such truths are heard they will hopefully increase our ability to respond at the personal, interpersonal and community level in ways that are more 'response-able'.





## Appendix A:

The following pictures, documenting the set up and showing of my art installation R.A.G.E. - shown at the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library – Main Library in the Reading Room on July 30, 2012 - were taken by Graphic Artist Brian Crowle (below) from StickIt! Digital Design Lab.

Pictures of the public were not taken during the show due to issues of consent. The participants in the pictures are family and friends who graciously consented to being photographed.



Brian Crowle and I, adjusting a banner on the gazebo structure that it would be displayed on. The next few pictures show me setting up the inner display.

















This is the inner display when set up was finished, and the next picture is from outside of the structure looking in through the barbed wire. Speculums, needles, stethoscope and BP cuff, surgical gloves, suture materials, gauze, bottles and textbooks bury the ‘student’ in the middle of the display. The barbed wire is there to also suggest a ‘difficult time getting out’ as the journey is often long for those that struggle with violence in their lives.





This and the next few pictures are of me placing the 'feet' stickers to help people move through the work from start to end. Then come general pictures of the display from various angles.

















This and the rest of the pictures are of family and friends who consented to 'pose' as the public had during the show to represent the viewers [as the public wasn't photographed due to issues of consent].









This was my one final look before the installation opened at noon on July 30, 2012 at the Sault Ste. Marie Public Library – Main Library in the reading room.

Thank-you again to everyone who was involved.

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