

# Our Combined Voice

Sexual Assault Awareness Month  
April 2008

## Calling Out to Men

April is nationally recognized as Sexual Assault Awareness Month. It is well known that sexual assault is statistically a crime most committed against women by men. The pioneering advocates who have risen up against sexual assault have commonly been women. They have made great strides in combating this crime, a crime that is often too sensitive of a topic for people to have an open dialogue. We also must remember that silence is an affirming action. Affirming in the sense that remaining quiet implies the problem isn't worth our attention to speak out. Sexual assault is a crime that needs both men and women on the frontlines.

There are many crusades for people to voice their concerns. Why would a man choose to pick this one?

For men who have daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers, please contemplate the reality of sexual assault and general sexism in America. We must challenge other men to reconsider their actions in effort to create a better society. Using phrases such as "don't be a sissy" or "be a man, don't cry like a girl".

These statements that are often used to encourage our sons are in the same sentence demeaning our daughters. The way we talk, advertise on billboards, showcase women in magazines, is a national culture of sexism. We should not just avoid these issues, we should speak out against it.

Beyond words and pictures are the actions that speak even louder. Look at the statistical volume of sexual assault toward children: [15% of sexual assault victims are under 12] and [29% of sexual assault victims are between 12 and 17] The fact is that this horrible crime is closer to each of us than we may believe.

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## Survivor Bill of Rights

1. You have the right to be believed: to be given the same credibility as any other victim of crime.
2. You have the right to seek help.
3. You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, without prejudice against race, class, lifestyle, age, sex, or occupation.
4. You have the right to ask questions.
5. You have the right to make your own decisions and to change your mind.
6. You have the right to seek out others who will work with you to ensure that your rights are protected.
7. You have the right to heal!



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtfully committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

*-Margaret Mead*

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### Sexual Assault Data

- Every 2 minutes, somewhere in America a person is sexually assaulted.
- 1 in 6 American women are victims of sexual assault, 1 in 33 men are victims.
- 73% of sexual assaults were committed by someone known to the victims.
- Only 6% of rapists will ever spend a single day in jail.

[www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)

# The Old Survivor by the Sea

by *Belinda Martinez*

I saw an old man by the seaside.  
 He was fishing off the end of a pier.  
 I asked what he hoped to be catching.  
 He answered, "I got it. You're here."  
 He handled his pole like an expert.  
 His motion was graceful and free.  
 He reeled in his line, less the sinker.  
 And handed it over to me.  
 "I know nothing of fishing," I told him.  
 "I came to the sea to escape."  
 He blinked back his tears as he nodded.  
 "I too, was a victim of rape."  
 The silence that followed was welcome.  
 I stood there with nothing to say.  
 I clung to the pole, though still shaken.  
 The stranger explained it this way:  
 "I know that it's tough just surviving  
 Abuses and moral decay.  
 And try as we might to escape them,  
 It's best if we cast them away.  
 "So I came to the sea as a young boy,  
 Determined to end it all here.  
 But I could not jump into the water.  
 A survivor was out on the pier.



**"A feminist is anyone who recognizes the equality and full humanity of women and men."**

**-Gloria Steinem**



"He taught me to tie up my sorrows  
 And raise the pole back in the air.  
 He showed me how casting and fishing  
 Can be healing and holy, like prayer.  
 "His line soared out over the water.  
 The sinker he used was my hate.  
 And tying a knot for assurance,  
 He added my tears as the bait.  
 "He gave me his pole, that survivor,  
 And trusted that I would remain.  
 He turned then, and left me alone there,  
 Just casting away all my pain.  
 "It took me a long time to notice,  
 Or maybe I just failed to look,  
 But the hate and the grief I had tied on  
 Were somehow removed from the hook.  
 "So now you have come to relieve me.  
 It's your turn with this rod and reel.  
 Just practice your tying and casting,  
 That you might help someone else heal.  
 We learn what we can when we're mentored.  
 And the old man taught healing to me.  
 Now it's my turn to wait by the seaside,  
 For someone with more hurt than me.

## Moving On

"I barely manage to function  
 all day. When I wake up in  
 the morning I just want to  
 stay in bed. I feel like there is  
 a dark cloud following me  
 around. I feel sad and can't  
 remember what it feels like to  
 be happy."

-sexual assault survivor

Don't think of the times ahead as rough,  
 Think of them as new challenges to overcome.  
 Your life is just a giant book,  
 And up until now, it has been written for you.

You'll be on your own soon,  
 So it'll be your turn to rite in its pages.  
 So fill it with the sweetest poetry,  
 And even some of the saddest ballads.

Things will be fine,

For this is not the end; it's just a new beginning.  
 Just remember even though you're adding new chapters,  
 Never hesitate to read the pages of the past.

For these are your memories,  
 And with these comes the strength,

To keep moving on.

Never let them go... and everything else will fall into place.

"I feel like a part of me died,  
 like my life will never be the  
 same. Because I was raped  
 by my boyfriend as a teen, I  
 feel like I missed the chance  
 to have a normal adoles-  
 cence when everyone says  
 those should have been the  
 best years of my life."

-sexual assault survivor

# Calling Out to Men

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Digging deeper into sexual assault, the effects upon the victim is suffering far more than the initial attack. Victims of sexual assault are 3 times more likely to suffer from depression, 6 times more likely to suffer from post traumatic stress disorder, 13 times more likely to abuse alcohol and 26 times more likely to abuse drugs. Last but definitely not least, sexual assault victims are 4 times more likely to contemplate suicide.

As a caring community, it's easy to see the initial crime and be horrified that it can happen. We then can look at the lasting effects and continue to be angry that such crimes occur. At the end of it all, we can choose to be silent or choose to make a difference.

Women have been on the front lines fighting against sexual assault for a long time. Men should join in the solution by being role models for their sons and a strong foundation for their daughters. They should speak up when hearing derogatory and sexism remarks because these attitudes are what perpetuates gender bias. They can have an influence on other men and challenge long-standing beliefs that contribute to gender stereotyping.

There is cost involved for men to join this form of activism. That cost could be the possible loss of friends who choose not to listen. If you decide to speak out, you may soon find yourself in the minority of your circle of friends. But a choice to speak out or remain silent will be made by every man at some point. I believe the benefits to humanity outweigh the costs incurred. But the choice is yours.

**"You don't have to be anti-man to be pro-woman."**

**-Jane Galvin-Lewis**

On the final page of this newsletter is a pledge. A commitment that I encourage every man to make for the sake of their daughters, sisters, mothers, wives, and other women they hold in their heart. Make it a priority in your life to take a stand and help a movement that has been decades in the making. I guarantee there will be many opportunities for us all to voice our concern. Will we have enough courage and conviction to take on the issue when opportunity knocks?

## The Clothesline Project

What is the clothesline project? It is a method for victims and survivors of sexual assault to voice their assault in a unique way. Each shirt placed upon the clothesline is created by the survivor and can include words, artwork, and personal design. The Clothesline Project serves a few purposes. It can be an educational tool for people who visit one of the many Clothesline Projects throughout the country. It also can be a healing tool for anyone making a shirt to place on display. Much like the Old Survivor by the Sea poem, where the survivor placed her hate and grief upon the hook and sinker, the Clothesline Project allows the survivor to cast their hate and grief upon the shirt, then hang it upon the clothesline and walk away. The Clothesline Project also serves the purpose of allowing those suffering in silence to realize they are not alone.



The first Clothesline Project was in October 1990 in Hyannis Massachusetts. On a village green, 31 shirts were displayed on that first clothesline which was part of a "Take Back the Night" rally. The idea kept growing and a national response brought the Clothesline Project from a single, grassroots event into a national campaign. Today, there are an estimated 500 Clothesline Projects with over 50,000 shirts on display around the world.

Lewis County Opportunities has a mobile Clothesline Project that will be on display at various locations across the county. Please come out and see for yourself our Clothesline Project created by the hands of victims and survivors of sexual assault. Our Clothesline Project is made by local victims and survivors of sexual assault. Because of the nature of this healing tool, some of the shirts can be graphic in wording, but to censor the voices of survivors is to turn our backs upon them. We will not compromise the integrity of their voice.

April Clothesline Project Locations:

- Lewis County Hospital Lobby
- Lewis County Mental Health

## Lewis County Opportunities, Inc.

8265 State Rte 812  
Lowville, NY 13367

24 Hour Hotline: 376-HELP (4357)  
Phone: 315-376-8202  
Fax: 315-376-8421  
E-mail: [smathys@lcops.org](mailto:smathys@lcops.org)

On the web at:  
[www.lewiscountyopportunities.com](http://www.lewiscountyopportunities.com)



Our Domestic Violence/Rape Crisis Services are supported by the following funding sources:

- County of Lewis
- Mary Kay Ash Foundation
- NYS Crime Victims Board
- NYS Department of Health
- NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services
- NYS Office of Children and Family Services
- The United Way of Northern New York, Inc.
- Northern New York Community Foundation

A beacon of light in times of darkness.

Make a pledge.

Promise to never commit, condone, or remain silent about violence against women. Respect, listen, and share power with women. Know that together we can change the world.



## Volunteering Opportunities

We need your help to provide support to victims of crime living in Lewis County. If you are compassionate and can donate two to three evenings per month to our hotline, we need you!

Volunteers receive free initial training and continuing educational is provided. Our hotline can be forwarded so that you can volunteer from your own home and help people in need. For more information, please contact us, we would love to hear from you.



Please contact Mary at

(315) 376-8202 x253