

the survivors' issue

Rape Crisis news



A newsletter from Rape Crisis Scotland

Issue 11 -
Spring 2013



survive
and
thrive

*A special issue of Rape Crisis News
in which survivors share their stories
and experiences through articles, poetry,
interviews , and some wonderful artwork*

Cover picture 'Tree of Life' by EWRASAC support group

Contents

My Date with Justice
- p. 2-5

The Case for Coming Forward
- p. 6-7

Poem
- p. 8-9

How I Became a Rape Victim (Herbs & Hags)
- p. 10-16

Police & Forensics: a survivor's view
- p. 17-19

Wall of Healing
- p. 20-22

Survivors' Gallery
- p. 23-25

Colette Barrie: My Story
- p. 26-30

16 Impacts of Sexual Assault - p. 31-33

SEESAW
- p. 34-39

Acknowledgements

Rape Crisis Scotland offers sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed to this issue - a special number dedicated to all survivors.

Here we celebrate courage and resilience in the aftermath of sexual violence as well as the mutual support, creativity, education and campaigning for change made possible by the inspiration and generosity evident in the accounts and reflections shared by contributors.

Included in this issue are first-hand narratives from women on their experiences of the justice process, reflections on a rape-supportive culture and the impact of sexual violence, as well as a range of powerful poetry and artwork which has emerged from experiences of sexual violence and in some cases formed part of a healing process.



'Freesia' by Aileen Carruthers
www.aileencarruthersart.co.uk

My Date With Justice

My life changed on Friday 25th June 2010, when trusting a friend turned into a nightmare, a situation that I would never believe I'd find myself in.

Seven months of hell led me to this point. I had a date. I had a date with justice. My date at Glasgow Crown Court started on the 10/01/2011 and lasted two weeks.

Day 1

Anxious is an understatement about how I felt that morning. What I should wear? How should my hair be? My appetite evaded me, I felt physically sick. I arrived at court thirty minutes early and met the

wonderful Witness Services advisors; they showed me to the witness room (which was claustrophobic) and told me that a jury was being empanelled and the proceeding would start shortly.

Well was I in for a shock, I was called into a room by the deputy advocate to asked some questions - the defence wanted to know if I was doing this for money (as if), if I ever used his phone (I wasn't even allowed to touch it) and had I met his brother (no he wasn't in this country). I signed an agreement so they could check if I claimed for criminal injuries and gave a statement.

My Date With Justice

They told me an expert was going to look at the mobile phone that "Joel" used and I would be called as a witness tomorrow, so I went home.

Day 2

I woke up extremely tired as I'd had a restless night and tried to eat some toast but couldn't keep it down. I arrived forty minutes early and paced the floor not knowing what to do with myself. A tannoy announcement called my case. The Witness Services lady held my hand and said "Be strong and tell the truth. You have nothing to worry about."

The door opened and I entered the court. He was covered by a screen (thank god). There was a camera in front of me and my witness supporter was sitting just behind me. It was so scary seeing all these faces looking at me. I scanned the jury seven women eight men, all looking at me, but could they see ME??!! I swore the oath to tell the truth and the Crown started their investigation. My name, my age, where I live, where I work, general questions to try and go some way put me at ease.

The questioning moved on to how we met and how the relationship progressed. I tried telling them about his controlling nature, how after one week he started trying to force me into having his baby, but the defence lawyer (who I nicknamed "Hitler") objected. She jumped up and shouted so loudly I was taken aback and slightly unnerved. Then it moved onto what happened that night. I had to tell every sordid detail of the rape. I allowed two tears to drop from my eyes but kept them hidden away. Two hours passed before the judge let me have a break.

When I got back to the room I broke down. I cried so much that I was physically sick in the bin, the Witness Services lady allowed my sister and

friend to come in and comfort me. Fifteen minutes later I had to go back. I wiped away the tears and took a deep breath and regained my composure. The questioning moved onto what happened the next day when I first disclosed what happened to me. Then there was the Facebook evidence and the majority of my trial was all about his admission on Facebook. I told them about me phoning Rape Crisis in a panic because he sent me a private message on Facebook saying we were meant to be together and that he was going nowhere, how I went to Archway and had a forensic examination and how I went to the police and reported it.

I found out his name was John Ssewagudde and not Joel Lyazi, he was 21 not 28, that the family he told me he had did not exist and that he was an illegal immigrant. I found out the man I knew did not exist.

Day 3

I cried myself to sleep the night before as today was the Defence's turn. When I got to the court I was so nervous. I didn't know what to expect, except I was in for a hard time. "Here we go again," was my thought when the case was called. When I walked into the courtroom the jury were really studying me, the same as the court officials. I gave them a weak smile and a nod of the head. Hitler stood up and began to question me. She allowed no other answers except yes or no but I flaunted the rules and tried to elaborate on my answers, feeling proud as I stood up to her. She tried to insinuate that I knew his name was John, when I said Joel she asked "Do you mean John?" I replied, "No Joel, Joel is the man I knew, Joel is who I had a brief relationship with, Joel is sitting behind that screen, Joel is on the college card, it is not the Joel in the passport, I do

My Date With Justice

not know a John". She left that subject alone and never came back to it.

She went on to imply that I was lusting after this man and I was up for twice that night, she implied I had a sexual relationship with his brother (who funnily enough never gave evidence in the trial and who I have never met) and she asked me if I gave him breakfast. I said yes and I could see where she was going with it. Tears of regret pricked my eyes. She slammed her hand down hard on a surface and said "I never asked you that. Please answer yes or no." I said "Yes". She ridiculed me due to the fact that I sent him joking messages after it happened (he was part of a group of people who I would forward the jokes onto). I glanced up to the jury to see their reaction and I could see a few stifled giggles. She glared at me and shouted, "Look at the production and not them". Like a naughty school girl I held my head down.

She painted the picture that I looked at his phone and was overcome with jealousy and stole it, that we had a huge argument and I threw him out of the house, that I then embarked on a hate crime against him and I sent the messages to my Facebook profile admitting that he raped me. I do not know how he was supposed to have got his phone back but he was found with it on him when the police came to arrest him.

Day 4

I was no longer required, so I stayed away from court as I knew it would be too difficult to listen to the trial. My sister gave evidence as she was the only person who had met him and identified him as Joel not John. My friend was the next witness and Hitler ripped her to shreds implying that she and I worked together to get the Facebook admission.

Day 5

It's Joel's turn to give evidence, Hitler paints him as the victim. He says I constantly phoned crying and I was suicidal (which I was not), how he tried to tell me to leave him alone and so many other lies about my character.

When the advocate cross-examined him, he went from the quiet scared victim to a screaming maniac. In his screaming rant he came out with some ridiculous lies. Apparently I had to pay men to sleep with me, I had HIV (which thank goodness I don't) and how I was "gagging for it" and so much more. My sister was watching in the gallery and said everyone got a fright and looked shocked by the sudden outburst.

Days 6-7

Various officials came in and out: the police, the computer expert, the nurse who examined me, a psychologist, a bruises expert and some more.

Day 8

I got a phone call that morning to tell me I was recalled. Upset does not cover it. I thought my part was over. I waited at the court for four hours before I gave evidence and some of his friends were there staring at me. I have never felt so vulnerable, afraid or isolated as I did at that time. I took the stand. What did Hitler ask me about? Facebook! She implied again that my friend and I co-inspired for the confession. I replied "No I wanted him to admit what he had done and say it out loud to make it real for me and him."

Then advocate cross-examined me. He asked me at the end for my thoughts. I got to say what I was thinking "Facebook didn't rape me, Joel did" "I invited him into my house, I allowed him to stay. Did I deserve it? No I didn't" and also showed the fact that stress made me pull my hair out. Hitler's head spun round so fast she

My Date With Justice

looked like something out of The Exorcist, I know why - she didn't want me to be seen as the victim.

Day 9

The closing speeches. I didn't go to these and I'm glad I didn't because in personal and graphic ways they were talking about me, questioning my actions and my character, nothing to do with him. That night I wept myself to sleep

Day 10 – the verdict

This was the most nerve racking of all. Did the jury see me or the image Hitler had portrayed? Did they believe me and was there enough evidence? We were given a nicer room; this one had a window (not a great view) plus tea and coffee. The case was called over the tannoy. I walked out of the room and his friends were going into the court. An older man looked at me with sympathetic eyes. I didn't want to go in but felt a shove at my back, so I sat in the furthest corner seat.

He was brought up to the dock. I gripped my friend's hand. This was the first time I'd seen him since that night. He spotted me and gave a half smile. He thinks he is going to get away with it. When the jury came in they spotted me straightaway. I felt the eyes; I couldn't breathe, scanning their faces for a hint of the verdict. My knuckles were white for gripping my friend's hand too tightly. The judge asked the jury, "Do you have a verdict?" The chairman said "Yes Your Honour" "How do you find the defendant?" "GUILTY Your Honour" by a majority vote. I nearly passed out and started to sob. I mouthed thank you to the jury and a flood of emotions took over. It was completely overwhelming. The sentencing was deferred to the following month.

When he was taken down to the docks he gave a thumbs-up to his pals.

The sentencing - 18/02/2011

I went with a band of friends for support. When he was brought up to the dock he grinned at me and made me feel quite scared but I went to find out how long he was going to be put behind bars for what he had done to me.

The Judge gave a closing speech before he passed sentence. In it he showed leniency for a number of factors; Joel's age, being a church goer, charity worker, obtained an education (even though on false details), that he didn't know if my stress was part of the impending trial or for what happened to me (to me they are connected).

Four years backdated to July 2010 and an opportunity for early release in 2012 was his sentence. Joel's reaction? He laughed and gave me a peace sign.

What's happening now

In a desperate attempt to stay in the UK he has launched an asylum bid, claiming he is gay and if sent home he would be killed. This he may possibly win.

I've learned so much from this experience and it's completely changed my outlook on life. I want to now go on and help people who are in the situation I once was. I don't look for pity. I understand it can destroy a person's life but for me that will never happen. From the pits of despair you have to come out fighting. Inner strength and a positive mental attitude are key. I've learned the true beauty of friendship.

The worst night of my life has led to the best two years of my life. I wouldn't be the person I am today. Alison

The case for coming forward

The Jimmy Savile investigation showed the public once again that the problem of underreported rapes and sexual abuse is still prevalent everywhere.

It is also a perfect example of what is wrong with society when it deals with rape and sexual abuse and highlights the reasons why many victims choose not to come forward. Victims fear not being believed, seeing their abuses stigmatised and sometimes used against them.

I can relate to that perfectly. My journey to get justice started just over a year ago, a year full of changes in my life and thankfully in the world too. At first sight my case isn't the most successful one to recall while trying to convince rape victims they should report what has happened to them. It might even appear as one of the worst. I remember that just after my report I posted comments all over the web in order to advise other victims not to report the ordeal they had gone through. The scars of what had just happened to me were still too fresh and not healing at all. I changed my mind after receiving hundreds of supportive messages from people considering me as an inspiration to them. I had never felt that way but I also thought that if other abused and raped people could get an advantage from hearing my story, then it was worth it to tell.

Unbeknownst to many, my ex boyfriend was an abuser and rapist who was honing his skills. He had even masterminded a plan to get away with that, and was learning how to manipulate his victims better while volunteering for two years for a charity that supported vulnerable people (not affiliated to RCS). When he had applied to get into it, he knew very well he was cheating and his intentions were far from sincere. He subsequently

admitted to me that he had committed similar abuses to previous girlfriends and boasted he had got away with it in a very clever manner. Obviously he was quite aware of what he was doing and knew how to play the 'Mr. Nice Guy' role in front of police forces too. My case was desperate from the start and I lost count of all the rape myths I found myself fighting. It also shocked me that everyone constantly seemed very concerned about the rapist's rights while the victim's rights had been conveniently forgotten. At one point, it got so bad that I thought I was the one in the accused's chair.

At the end of 2011, I had almost spent one year in a relationship with this monster and my life was full of so many abuses that I was on the brink of suicide. The most dominant feeling in my life had become fear and in the end I had found myself fearing for my life too. I also knew that whichever way I was going to choose, my life was going to be ruined anyway.

Yet, it didn't matter. After much thought, I decided to report him. The case fell under the domestic violence laws though and my ex only received a warning (or so I was told by police forces). It was only after a chat with a Scottish Women's Aid volunteer and a Domestic Abuse Liaison Officer that the report was updated as rape. At first, I was so ignorant about rape issues that in the first report I hadn't actually called what had happened to me as 'multiple rapes' but sexual abuse.

Despite my ex boyfriend having previous allegations of a violent nature against him and the fact that there was a lot of written evidence he had committed the abuses, he wasn't convicted. The rapes were all historical and corroboration laws made the conviction appear improbable. Unfortunately, he also had 'polished' his reputation after having moved from

The case for coming forward

his native town and police pointed out that such a 'good' guy couldn't be the monster I depicted. The DC and police officers charged with my case turned on me and filed a report against me for wasting their time and energy. I was taken away for questioning on a Saturday morning and got detained for hours at the police station, being asked the stupidest questions I ever heard in my life. His reputation wasn't even in discussion, mine was though and in so many ways I can't even recall. As a rape victim, I fell victim to rape myths and society's prejudice.

Despite the police trying to push me to recant the statement, I stayed strong and never gave up. I knew I was telling the truth and that was going to come out at some point. Fortunately, after a few letters and trips to the Procurator Fiscal's office, I received a letter from the Crown Office saying that no criminal proceedings were going to be taken against me. In a certain way, that was my victory because what really mattered to me was being believed. I never cared to appeal or re-open the case afterwards, I knew I had a life to build up again.

However, as soon as that part of my life was over, a few months ago, I thought it would do some good to approach other victims and survivors and help them to get through their 'nightmares'. I also started to challenge rape myths. What happened to me is nothing I'm ashamed of. I am not ashamed to say I was in a bank while there was an armed robbery and that I had a car accident I nearly died after. It wasn't my fault in any case. Raped victims and survivors need to stop blaming themselves for what happened because that was the rapist's fault. It was his choice to act in that way, it wasn't the victim's choice. The blame will always lie with rapists, no matter what society thinks or makes us believe.

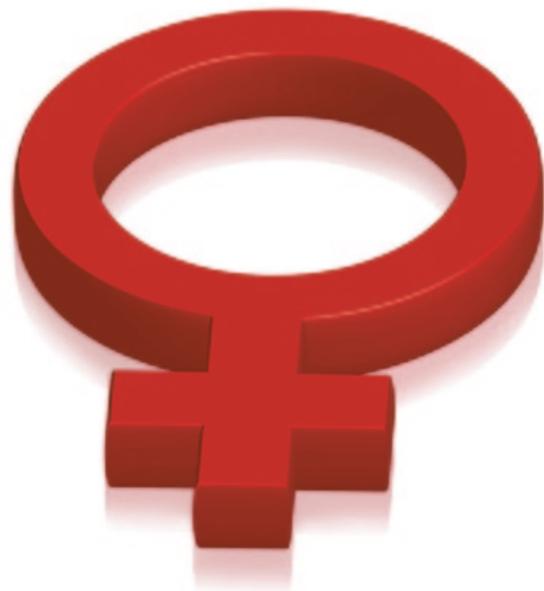


A brighter future - Sarah's wedding bouquet

I feel proud to say I'm a rape and abuse survivor and empowered by the fact I went through such an ordeal and survived. Nightmares and flashbacks are still there and who knows when they will disappear (if they ever will), but I know I am the one who learnt the most useful lesson out of what happened and I intend to use it to change the perception of people concerning rape myths and rape victims' rights.

UNITED we can make our voices heard. One voice can be suppressed but many can't.

Sarah



Poem

I used to feel like I wanted to die
Now I realise what I've been missing

Gentle words of correction
No mind games, no coercion
Safety from harsh punishments
But with advice and guidance
Patience, kindness and reassurance
And protection from the world

Instead you crush my innocence
And steal what is most precious
Treated as less human
Just a piece of meat
My breath shallow, my heart weak

A life built of sorrow and lies
With foundations of failure
Roofed by violation, caged with punishment
Not believed, a failure with no relief

How can I break free
After all it was not me
I didn't do, I scream, I cry
You lie she says you lie, you lie
Punishments not known to mankind
For crimes committed by the girl
She tries to be kind

Distorted ideas of goodness
Twisted beliefs of right and wrong
Why did I never belong
It really makes no sense
Hitting me when I had no strength
Do you realise how much you let me down
You knew what they were doing to me
You knew I would struggle to be free

The torture, the games
Their cruelty, it stays
I'm stuck, I'm trapped
One man, two man, maybe more
"Thank the lord you have me"
That is what he said to me

"we're cleaning your soul so you can be free!
A witness to hell, I'll never be free
Of all the disgusting sick things they done to me
The things I've touched, seen and smelt

Poem



**I'll never forget that potent scent
And they still hear every word
With their blood sucking microphone bugs**

**Thanks a lot mum
Now little me is angry
Little me is scared
She's crying, she's sore
She can't do it anymore**

**My punishment continues on to this day
making me sick, really not well
Still punished for crimes, I didn't commit
I don't know when they will come for me
I just have to wait and see**

**But there's a light in the darkness
With things on the mend
Planting seeds for the road to success
Free from the house, but stuck in the garden
Entangled in memories, over grown wild
Constrained by the past, I am waiting to flourish
Craving some strength, and real common sense
Free from the manipulation and terror
They used to break my soul
So I'd keep their secret
But guess what
It's not a secret anymore**

***Poem by a young woman from SAY Women
Picture by EWRASAC survivor***

How I became a rape victim

The following article is reprinted with permission and grateful thanks to Herbs & Hags - <http://herbsandhags.blogspot.co.uk/>

I've been thinking about this recently, because rape has been in the news so much.

Ched Evans, the Twitter hate campaign against his victim, the I Believe Her campaign in response, the girls in Oldham who were groomed and raped... and the discussion about why they became rape victims, what it was about them which enabled a bunch of misogynist predators to exploit them so viciously with so little awareness of their humanity. What was shocking to me was that anyone was bothering to discuss what it was about the girls that made them rape victims, re-inforcing the notion that rape only happens to certain sorts of women. It's a very strong idea in our culture and one which keeps rape victims in denial about their experience and ensures that they don't face up to what happened to them for weeks, months or years in some cases, because their image of themselves, doesn't fit in with the image they've been fed, of a rape victim. So I want to talk through the step-by-step process of how a woman can be set up to become a rape victim and how that has nothing to do with her and everything to do with the man who decides to rape her.

I was eighteen years and four months old, so officially already an adult woman. It was the summer holidays before the start of university and independence. We'd all got our A Level results and were sorting out university places and someone at school had a big party in a church hall, a present from her parents for doing well in her A Levels and being eighteen. I wore my new dress of blue velvet, the possession of which I felt, placed me in the realms of the cool people.



Early on in the evening, I was talking to a friend when a boy came up to me and kissed me. I say boy, I suppose I mean man, but I still thought of male peers as boys. (He was 19 by the way.) Without warning, without comment, he just grabbed me, held me close around him so I couldn't move and thrust his tongue into my mouth and kissed me.

I found this repulsive and startling, yet Bohemian, exciting and off the wall. I had no idea who this guy was, had never seen him before in my life, knew immediately that I didn't fancy him, but it didn't even cross my mind to question his right to simply overstep any normal boundaries. It was a party. Men were supposed to behave like that, as far as I knew. It would have been uptight, prudish, strait-laced, to object. No-one had told me that only rapey men behave like that, normal men who fancy you but don't have a sense of entitlement, don't just grab you in that way. I ran off giggling with my friend, who was slightly perturbed by his behaviour and with hindsight, probably by my reaction. "He was weird", but I was too excited and naively flattered that I'd notched up an "I've got off with someone" mark so early in the evening - it meant that a man had noticed me and that was

Herbs & Hags

something to strive for, wasn't it - it's what women are socialised to do - strive for positive male attention. It meant I could be in that group on Monday morning, who had got off with someone on Saturday night. I'd never been in that group before, I felt like I'd arrived. I'd grown up in a family where my personal boundaries, privacy, self-determination, had never been respected, so I didn't find it as much of an intrusion as my friend did.

For the rest of the party though, I deliberately avoided him because although his behaviour had given me access to the cool group, I didn't fancy him and found him pretty repulsive and didn't really want to repeat the experience of the kiss. I occasionally saw him watching me, intently, and I saw nothing sinister about it. I had no suspicions, no sixth sense, no spidey feeling that warned me that this man was a sexual predator. How could I have? I grew up in a society where the Impulse ad was on the telly - a man grabs a woman at a station and snogs her and no-one calls that sexual assault, they said that "Men just can't help acting on Impulse". That was the slogan. So when a man did that to me at a party, I didn't think it was a sexual assault, I just thought it was some unattractive chancer who was behaving normally. The whole of my culture and upbringing, told me that. Besides, I found out he was the brother of someone in my class, someone I fancied to be honest; someone I was rather hoping to get off with at some point, but I figured that this bloke might have ruined that for me tonight. People's brothers were OK, you didn't need to worry about them.

It took me years to realise that that kiss, had been a set-up: that the reason he had targeted me in that way, was to ensure that later on, if I complained about being raped, he could point to that and have lots of witnesses saying that we'd been seen

kissing earlier on at the party. That way, he could be absolutely sure that he'd get away with it, because as everyone knows, once a woman kisses a man, he then has the right to penetrate her body whether she wants him to or not. I heard later on, that he'd kissed another girl in exactly the same way. So he set two of us up, but she was the one who got away.

When a bunch of us left in a big group to walk down to the cab office, he was in that group. As we walked along he sidled up to me and started talking. I talked back out of politeness. Women are socialised to be polite, to respond to men's conversational overtures, even where earlier on they may have over-stepped a mark, we're supposed to put it behind us and move on and not think anything of it. So that's what I did. I conformed to normal behaviour and talked normally to him. Without really knowing how it happened, I realised we were somehow falling behind the rest of the group. At first it didn't worry me. They were in sight, it's just that we were far behind them now. At one point I said something about it and tried to catch up with them, but he pulled me back. It was at that point that I suppose the victim-blamers will say that I should have screamed, shouted, cried for help. Because it was at that point I should have realised he was planning to rape me. But I didn't. Because I was also taught, that to assume that a man is a rapist just because he's stopping you doing something you are showing clearly that you want to do, is hysterical, man-hating, hairy-pitted feminism which is a Bad Thing. And so once again, his boundary-breaking behaviour, didn't really bother or alarm me as I didn't perceive it as boundary-breaking, I perceived it as normal. Women's boundaries are constantly being broken by men and we are told all the time, that if we make a fuss about it, we are unreasonable, unfriendly, rude, hysterical, difficult, confrontational

How I became a rape victim

- all negatives, all things we should strive not to be. So if you are young and have never been raped and don't know how common it is and you know that your boundaries are supposed to be broken because that's what society has told you, you don't feel alarm when a man breaks them yet again. In my case, I felt slight irritation, but nothing more.

When he pulled me back, he drew me into a doorway and started to kiss me. I resigned myself to the prospect of having to snog him for a bit before going to get my cab, because it didn't occur to me to knee him in the balls and run away screaming from him, as some will say I should have done at that point; if I had done, doubtless I would have been accused of hysterical over-reaction, but seeing as how he was bigger and stronger than me, that wasn't an option anyway. Every now and then, we carried on walking and he would draw me into another doorway and kiss me some more. Little by little, we were getting closer to the cab office.

One little doorway turned out to have a little alley way next to it. Before I'd even noticed it, he was pulling me down the alley, laughing conspiratorially as if this was my idea too, drawing me into his "naughtiness". Even then, I didn't feel threatened. Even then, I didn't expect this man to rape me. Why would I? He was someone's brother, not a rapist in a dark alley... oops.

Right up until the moment he actually pulled my knickers down and I felt his penis, I genuinely had no idea he would actually rape me. Even as he entered my body, my main emotion was utter incredulity. I simply couldn't believe this was happening. This repulsive man had somehow separated me from my friends, dragged me down an alley and was raping me. And I'd bloody co-operated,

I hadn't made a fuss, I'd gone along with it, I'd just let him do it. I felt total disbelief. And I felt bloody stupid. Like so many rape victims, I blamed myself for not spotting that he was a rapist and extricating myself from his rape, instead of blaming him for being a rapist. I lay there and waited for him to finish, hoping it would be quick so that I could get home.

Afterwards, he asked me if I was OK and then asked for my phone number. I gave him it, too stunned to know what else to do. He then walked me to the cab office, "so that I'd be safe" (!) and said he'd call me.

All the way home, I thought about whether I'd been raped or not and like many rape victims, convinced myself I hadn't been. I felt like I had, but I told myself what society would have told me - that I was wrong and unreasonable to feel that way, I hadn't said no, or at least, if I had, I hadn't said it strongly enough, aggressively enough, I hadn't fought him off, I hadn't resisted being pulled down the alley, I hadn't resisted at all. Except that I had resisted, just not in a way that society defines resistance. Society has allowed rapists to define what resistance is: screaming, crying, scratching, pushing, kicking, biting, punching. I didn't resist like that. My resistance was to wriggle a bit, turn my head away when he tried to kiss me, try to stop his hand going into my bra and knickers, push him ineffectually, talk about wanting to get my cab; all things which normal men recognise as not being enthusiastic participation when they are engaging with women but pretend it's a grey area when they talk about rape. Rapists have managed to get society to believe that what I did was consent. Because I didn't resist in the way rapists - and society - say that women should resist, they define our non-participation as consent. (More about why consent has been constructed to enable rapists to get

Herbs & Hags

away with rape here: <http://herbsandhags.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/whats-wrong-with-consent.html>)

I hadn't treated him the way society says women treat rapists, I'd treated him the way many women actually treat rapists - like a bit of a nuisance who have to be tolerated for a bit. I'd been socialised to believe that you just had to put up with men touching you when you didn't want them to. The one time I'd seen a woman react furiously to such treatment, everyone laughed at her and said how over the top she was and how unreasonable when he didn't mean anything by it. So I'd absorbed the message, that to treat a man who was acting like a rapist as if he were a rapist - the way society tell us to - was to be an hysterical, unreasonable bitch and you lose approval ratings if you're one of those, don't you, so like most young women, I'd buckled down to that message. It's what women do. And then society tells us that it's our fault we were raped, because we didn't do the thing they call us hysterical bitches for, when we do do it. I didn't act like the unreasonable bitch everyone had laughed at when he first overstepped my boundaries, so it was my fault he raped me.

And besides, I had had a couple of beers (although I wasn't drunk) and I was wearing a short, skin-tight blue velvet dress. The blue velvet dress which had marked me out as belonging to the cool crowd, also marked me out as the sort of woman who doesn't have the right to "cry rape" when she's raped. The police would just tell me it was my fault. My friend had been raped when she was 14 and they'd told her to go away and stop wasting their time. She had been legally a child and I was legally a woman and she'd been dragged into a park by a stranger - the classic, rare, stranger rape, not someone

who was someone's brother and therefore couldn't possibly be a rapist. And even then, they weren't remotely interested in catching the man who raped her or investigating the case at all. So I knew there was absolutely no chance, that the enforcers of the law, would be remotely interested in enforcing it in the case of a grown adult in a blue velvet dress.

I even felt guilty about allowing the thought that I'd been raped, to cross my mind. Like most of us, I'd absorbed the lie that women "cry rape" (that phrase that means women habitually make false allegations about rape) and that there are millions of wronged innocent men walking around having had their lives ruined by hysterical, man-hating women who imagined that they'd been raped because they're so stupid, or deliberately lied about it out of pure, unbridled malice. The horror that I might be one of those women, made me feel pity for my rapist and shame that I could even think such a thing about the poor man. I had no pity for my eighteen year old optimistic, rational, honest self; society had brain-washed me so effectively, that all my empathy was for him, none for me.

When he called me two days after the rape to ask me out, I said yes immediately. Mainly because I was afraid that if I didn't go out with him now, he would tell everyone what a slag I was, fucking him in an alleyway, but also because if I went out with him and was his girlfriend, then that meant it couldn't be rape, it would all be OK and I would stop feeling as though I had no control whatsoever about what happened to me with sex. I wanted to have sex with him in a normal way; in a bed, with me having some choice over it. It would mean that he hadn't raped me. It would make that Saturday night OK, the beginning of a romance, not what it still felt like - an attack on my autonomy.

How I became a rape victim

I found him utterly repulsive, boring to be with and I couldn't wait to get away from him, but I went out with him for 3 weeks to make it respectable and all OK in my mind and then I told him it wasn't working out for me and I thought we should stop seeing each other. When we parted, he kissed me, put his hands down my knickers again, just to show me that he could, and said to me "have a great time at university and don't sleep with anyone you don't want to". When I assured him I wouldn't, he said: "you already have".

I couldn't believe what he was telling me. He was telling me, that he was a rapist. That he knew he was a rapist. That my three weeks of boredom and bad sex with him, had been wasted. It hadn't been him being a bit drunk, not understanding my ineffectual wriggling away, not realising I didn't want to have sex with him; he knew it wasn't the "grey area" of rape myth. I was so startled that my immediate response was to deny what he said. "I haven't - I never have". He smiled. "Yes, you have."

Again it took me twenty years to realise what he was doing there. He was taking away any semblance of control or dignity I had. He wasn't willing to allow me the pretence that it had all been a big misunderstanding, that I'd tried to go out with him afterwards and see how we got on but it hadn't worked out; he wanted me to know exactly what he'd done and that he'd got away with it with my connivance and there wasn't a single thing I could do about it.

It took me twenty years to face up to that. In those twenty years, my immediate response to him raping me, was to leave me with a fatalistic attitude to sex; I felt totally unable to set any boundaries. I felt scared to tell a man I didn't want to have sex with him just now, or just here, or like that, because I couldn't take the risk that

my wishes would be over-ruled again and I would have to face the fact that I'd once more been forced to have sex I didn't want and that would prove that I was one of those women who were somehow designed for men to use and exploit, not like normal women. So I had lots of sex I didn't want, with men I didn't like, who didn't force me to have it but who didn't much care if I wanted it or not, to prove to myself that an unwanted fuck was no big deal and not worth getting upset about. I went through phases of celibacy lasting years followed by phases of one night stands with men who were of no interest to me whatsoever. I suppose it's fair to say that it pretty much ensured, that I had a totally screwed up attitude to sex without realising that that's what I had.

All that time, I only once tried to tell someone that I'd been raped. Two friends at university. I read an article about date rape, which presented the revolutionary concept that rapists aren't necessarily men in balaclavas with knives in dark alleys, they're just men who make you have sex you don't want to have. This revelation shook me so much, that I told a couple of friends about what had happened to me, but both of them suggested that I write him a letter saying how I felt - their primary concern was to ensure that I didn't call it rape, because obviously it couldn't be (like most women, it was more important to them to protect a man they'd never met from being called a rapist when he was one, than it was to acknowledge the rape of a woman who was a friend), it was just a misunderstanding (I had blocked out his parting shot so hadn't told them about that) and that he would want to reassure me that he hadn't meant to seem rapey, it had all been a big misunderstanding and then I'd feel better.

I did think of doing that, but something told me that he'd get off on a letter like that, so I left it and never told anyone

Herbs & Hags

else about it for another couple of decades. Like most rape victims, I was effectively silenced. What silenced me most, was the dread of not being believed. The knowledge that I would be asked: "but why didn't you shout?" "why did you let him separate you from your friends?" "why didn't you tell him to stop kissing you and to go straight to the cab office?" "why did you give him your phone number?" "why did you go out with him afterwards - even sleep with him afterwards?" "why didn't you tell your friends what had happened?" All the questions I asked myself for a couple of decades. Even now as I wrote this, You, Dear Reader, will note what care I have taken to try and explain my behaviour, to pre-empt the questions and criticisms and scepticism. To do what rape victims are always required to do and rapists rarely are: to account for my behaviour, to explain why I became a rape victim. The explanation: "because I was unlucky enough to meet a rapist" will not do, I know. Society doesn't want to blame men for making the choice to rape women, it wants to blame women for enabling men to make that choice and usually it succeeds. Rapists very rarely get to accept responsibility for their choice to rape, even rape victims blame themselves for their rapist's choice to rape them.

I'm done with accepting that blame. It was not my fault. I didn't do anything to make him do it. My fabulous blue velvet dress was not responsible. The fact that I'd had a couple of beers was not responsible. Even my abusive childhood, with its failure to inculcate self-esteem, was not responsible. Because I went out with him afterwards and had what society calls consensual sex with him a couple of times, doesn't mean it wasn't rape that one time. Because I didn't behave the way rape victims are supposed to behave (more on the image of rape survivors/victims here: <http://herbsandhags.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/youre-not-like-rape-victim.html>) doesn't mean it wasn't rape. Because I spent between two or three decades feeling unable to tell anyone in case they wouldn't believe me, doesn't mean it wasn't rape. It was rape, he is a rapist and I am a rape survivor. And the fact that neither of us behaved the way society says rapists and rape victims behave, doesn't mean it wasn't rape, it just means that society has got to stop misinforming the public about what rape is. Society keeps selling us the version of rape that rapists have invented: the one which enables them to carry on raping women and know that they will get away with it. We keep on making excuses for rapists, convincing their victims that they have no right to call it what it is.

For years I blamed myself for dating him afterwards, knowing I hated him and found him repulsive. I could never understand why I'd done that to myself, why I'd thought it so necessary. Why had I punished myself like that? I blamed myself for handing him power over me, the power to penetrate my body again when he knew I didn't want him to, the power to pretend that he wasn't a rapist, because his victim had gone back for more. Now, I blame the society which convinced an intelligent, popular teenager, that the only way to make rape OK, would be to date her rapist. It's nearly 30 years since that happened to me and society is still blaming women for rape, instead of blaming men. My daughter is facing the same dangers I faced: a 25% likelihood that she will be raped or sexually assaulted in her lifetime. If that does happen to her, like her mother, she's statistically unlikely to report it - only 10-15% of rape victims file a report. If she does, she's got only a 6% chance of seeing her rapist found guilty in a court of law.

How I became a rape victim

When it comes to rape, not much has changed for women in nearly three decades. I guess all I can do for her, is to raise her to expect her boundaries to be respected, to make her aware of how common rape is and to let her know that if she does get raped, it won't be because of anything she says or does or wears, it will be purely and simply because she has the bad luck to meet a rapist.

And for all the other girls and women out there, all I can do is speak out about my own experience and raise my son to know that if he is not sure a girl or woman wants him to carry on doing whatever

it is he's doing, then he needs to ask her and respect her answer, because if he doesn't, then he may be a rapist. Because rapists aren't usually scary men in dark alleys, they're someone's son, brother, father, uncle, cousin, friend, colleague. Somewhere out there, the man who raped me is probably raising a family and living a normal life, like most other rapists. And he's probably still pretending that he's not a rapist and society is still supporting him in that.

And that's how I became a rape victim.

Thanks for reading.



Picture by EWRASAC survivor

Rape Crisis Scotland spoke recently to one woman about her experiences with different agencies following a rape.

In these short extracts, she describes how she felt about the way the police and forensic services handled her case, and how sexual health services might take account of the needs of rape survivors.

RCS: Where do you think you would want to start in talking about what happened?

I think probably starting with the police handling of my case. The police handling was very, very positive from the minute that the first lady police officer came into the house. After the attack, I didn't want to phone the police - there was so many reasons for that...having my parents involved, things like that - just dragging the whole thing up again. And also – would I actually be believed? You read so many horror stories in the newspapers and I just thought, 'I don't want to go through all of this and then not be believed at the end of it'. So, my first thought was, 'I wasn't contacting the police...' Then I realised that I have to do something – 'this lad can't do this again' type thing, so we did contact the police and all my fears were wiped out from the very start.

The first officer that appeared at the house just made me feel so relaxed, I think even just introducing herself as a name - not "I'm PC so and so" and she gave me her first name, she just made me feel so relaxed I couldn't actually believe that I was beginning to feel the way that I was feeling, after what had obviously happened. I think what also helped as well this female officer stayed with me for the whole day so even when the first interview was being done at the

police station although the lad was lovely I never felt harassed or under pressure - everything was at my own pace. I think just having that familiar face sitting there - somebody that – although I had only known her for about an hour before that – just having that same person, that familiar face, that kind of reassurance as well, that really helped. She then came for the forensic examination with me, as I say she was with me throughout the day and that was just absolutely amazing.

RCS: And, that made a real difference having that familiar face there?

Yeah, definitely. I will admit that I got a shock when I turned up at the examination and it was a male doctor. I didn't want the examination. At the start when I seen the man I just thought, 'no I can't, I don't want him anywhere near me.' I just felt vulnerable, and everything kind of fell to bits at that point. But I did then sit with the female officer and she spoke to me for a while. She told me that I didn't have to go ahead with it ...but I may have to wait for a few hours for a female to be there, and so I decided that I was going to go ahead – I wanted it over and done with as quickly as possible, and I just wanted to get home to my own house, and my family. So, I went ahead with it, and the man couldn't have been nicer, he was an absolute gentleman and advised me all through what he was doing - there was never anything that he was doing that I wasn't aware was going to happen, and that was massive as well. But, I do think just for anybody going along to one of these things I think there should definitely be a same-sex physician. I think the person's obviously been through enough without having to then feel intimidated or vulnerable again by having someone there that they don't want to perform the examination.

I then met with the officer over the next

Police & forensics: a survivor's view

few days – I didn't actually see the lady again – the female officer – it was just the one day she was with me for the full day. But that was definitely something that I would think should be rolled out across the police, just having one officer, the familiar face.

RCS: And, that was ok that you didn't see her again?

It was strange, but then to be honest the officer that was then in charge of it - the lad - I met him I think it was the Monday or something and he was basically the guy that was looking after it for the whole time. So again, if I had to go and do the VIPER—

RCS: The ID—

The ID yeah, anything I had to do if it involved any other member of the police force this officer was always there. So not that I did see a lot of different people but even the few people that I did have to see and speak with, this other officer was always there again. So, it was mainly the two – the lady on the first day, and then the chap that I dealt with that was in charge of the case and he was absolutely amazing, the commitment that he put into that and he was just always there. I had his telephone number if I needed anything, if I thought of anything else he was always there for me and even when the case went to court and things, he was always there, he would phone to see how things went and the dedication was fantastic.

RCS: It sounds like it's really important to you that you had one point of contact and that they were proactive in keeping in touch with you, is that right?

Yes. And it wasn't just myself, it was other family members that felt like they had the

support there if they needed them as well, and that was huge. You just never ever felt as if you were a bother... he was just always there if you needed him. So, that was definitely huge, for me anyway.

RCS: And what about giving your statement? Like going back to that, how was that for you?

Yeah, that was the lad that took the statement - he was lovely – it was always at my pace. He would stop every now and again, "Do you want a cup of coffee?" "Do you want some water?" I never, ever felt as if he was questioning me, I never felt as if I was never believed...he was fantastic. And as I said before because this girl was also in the room I think that helped massively as well. But I couldn't fault any of the officers that I dealt with throughout, I couldn't fault them at all.

RCS: You sound really, really positive about the experience with the police. What was it you think that made it a positive experience for you? What was it that they did that you think really helped?

They were always there. They actually cared...and I never once felt as if I wasn't being believed. They were just solid - it was the support that they gave - not only myself but all the other family members. I know that the Federal Unit within Lothian and Borders Police had been set up only a week before the incident – before my attack – and these are a group of officers who are specialised in these things. I think probably having the one officer from Federal with me throughout the whole case, or the whole questioning side of it until they passed it over to the Procurator Fiscal. I think maybe if it hadn't been a specialised unit I'm not sure if I would've had the same person right through – I don't know. But I think just having this one specialised officer was fantastic. I don't

Police & forensics: a survivor's view

know if it would've been any different if this unit hadn't been set-up. I'll never know that. But, all I can say is that the support that these guys gave us was second to none.

RCS: And, what about your physical— or your sexual health needs after the rape? How were they met?

That was quite tough. When the attack happened it was in the November of the year that we had the really bad snow, and the clinic in St. Johns was closed for a number of weeks – obviously due to staff members not being able to get to work and things. So, I had been calling them and couldn't get through and by the time I actually got through to them so many weeks had passed and I wasn't able to get certain vaccinations that I should've got. But I was just told to come down to the clinic in St. Johns – which I did – and that was a bit of a nightmare, sitting waiting in the waiting room. I don't mean that I'm any different from anybody else - we're all there for the same kind of reasons, but I remember walking into the waiting room - the waiting room was full, and it was all just what I would class as wee boys. They were all very young males all just sitting laughing and joking, and I just remember one of their mobile phones ringing, and the boy just saying down the phone to the caller that he was "at the clinic waiting to get checked out"... and, I just felt absolutely awful. I just, I actually ended up laughing because I think I would've cried if I hadn't laughed. I just thought it was a horrible situation for anybody to be in. You're already feeling pretty vulnerable after what you've been through, and to have to sit in a waiting room... And, as I say, why should I feel as if I should be treated any differently? I suppose you could look at it that way as well. But it just wasn't a nice situation, or a nice environment for anybody that had been through what I

had been through to actually sit in.

What would've made it better for you? The response from like sexual health?

Well, I don't know, because even if you had an appointment, you still have to go down and sit in a waiting room. I know that just from recent events, and I've found out that there's a group in Glasgow that actually is kind of a one-stop kind of shop where all of these needs are taken care of, and I think having something like that would be so much nicer – if you can use nice? I think it would be so much better to have something like that and not have to wait for weeks, or to have to go to a clinic and sit with people that—that sounds really bad – but to hear things like that, to hear people kind of laughing and joking about getting checked out and stuff. It wasn't a nice feeling, and I think to actually have a kind of specialised group or somewhere that you could actually go to have these tests done. I think it would just feel so much more comfortable and make not a very nice experience a lot better.



Wall of healing

The Wall of Healing at Edinburgh Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre was created in recognition of the importance of survivors of sexual violence being able to have a voice.

Many survivors have been silenced throughout their lives through fear, threats, and shame. This is then compounded by being disbelieved when they have the courage to speak out. The survivors who have contributed to the Wall of Healing have been part of EWRASAC's support groups and long-term support.

Thanks to all survivors who have shared their feelings, experiences and hopes. Your voices are powerful and we hear them. They are an inspiration to us all and a force for change.

"The real reason to start with that I wanted to tell my story, was because I know there's a lot of other girls and boys out there that can identify with my circumstances and what happened to me. Even if they keep that recognition to themselves, if they can move on and do something for themselves...to know that there are other people out there, there is help, and no matter how bad things are, or can get, in some situations they can't get any worse - they can only get better, its just finding the first step to take to get there, like I had to do...I would like to see a lot of people see and read this, and if they do identify with it, not just say yes that's me, but maybe they can do something about it too. Don't be scared or ashamed or embarrassed or anything, because it is not our fault."

Rose



"In the past I have had to put up with being in care, being abused, having a kid, being raped, homeless, losing my family, losing my son all in the space of a year. Then I was put in a hostel. I went to a place called the Edinburgh Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre where I met a nice worker and I got to talk about what I wanted to. I didn't have to go into the details of what happened to me and she didn't make me so my trust for her has grown. I am just trying to get back on my feet now...Happy 30th EWRASAC and good luck for all the years to come!"

Louise

"He has lied to everyone and said he did not do it. People turned against me. I lost everything, I no longer felt safe at my home as his friends came shouting at me.

I went to the women's rape place and talked to someone. She helped me to get it out and to get a new place to stay as I did not feel safe...I have tried to take

Wall of healing

my life nine times since he raped me. He made me feel I was nothing and that I was worth nothing. I felt dirty and used. Now I hate men. I feel they are all the same and hope one day they show me I'm wrong!"

Anon.



"You took my childhood away from me. You sexually abused me for 7 years. I grew up trusting no-one, blaming myself for what you did to me. The pain inside me has been hell! And for years I hid this terrible pain inside me, you mucked my head into the way I am even now. At times I tried to kill myself but that didn't work, only to wake up to torture, locked up again, will it ever end?"

But this won't go on forever ...I still have nightmares, lock myself away and get so down... but let me tell you something, I will be free! Oh yes I will be free! "God is your judge," he will be the one to judge



what you did to me. I have a lot of friends now in my life who do love and care for me so all I am saying is time will heal me, and I say I will be free! I won't be that little girl anymore! NO WAY! NOT EVER!"

"I speak not only for myself but for a group of brave women who have shared the stories of their abused past with me...I then realized I was not alone.

I feel better about myself now. I was not to blame for what happened to me. The counseling I have received has helped me to become more confident, someone with dignity, better self esteem, a better mother and wife. Almost a whole person, not the shell that I was for many years."

Karen

All pictures by EWRASAC survivors

Wall of healing

“It’s not your fault. No exceptions.

It may feel you’re stuck, but just a small step at a time and you won’t be in limbo, you are not doomed to walk in darkness for the rest of your life; there are fellow human beings on this earth who can help, who understand, and who want to help you. The EWRASAC has been my life line back without a doubt, and has started me on this journey.

You have survived so much, so remember that even though you may have lost a battle or two, you don’t have to lose the war. You decide how long you are willing to fight to get yourself back.

I wish you every happiness and light, and share your hope for happier days ahead of you - you will recover and your heart, body and soul will be vibrant and full of life again if you give it a chance - one step at the time.”

A.



My Body

Starving hurts the soul
Like cutting breaks the skin.

I just don't know where I belong,
I feel I lose so much control

To laugh
To cry
To scream
To drink
To dance
To forget it out – to block it out

Want to die
Wish my life was just a lie

The pain
The anger
The tears
The fears
The flashbacks

When will males stop...
...hurting me inside.

Anon

Pictures by EWRASAC survivors

Survivors' Gallery



Survivors' Gallery



Art group project for International Women's Day

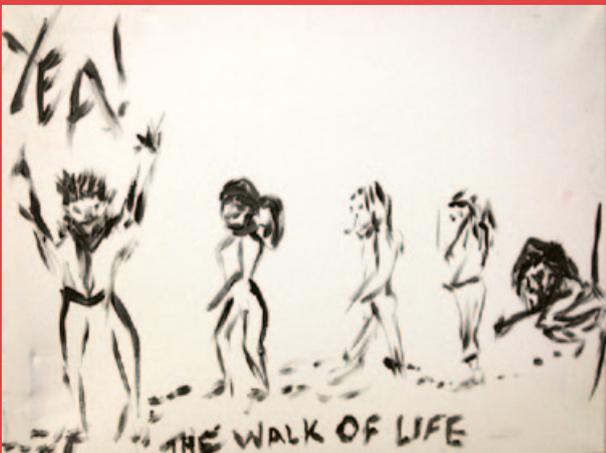


Your Voice is Free theatre project



Pictures by EWRASAC survivors

Survivors' Gallery



Pictures by EWRASAC survivors

Colette Barrie: My Story

Between the ages of 8 years old and 10 years old, I was sexually abused by a close male relative.

He had abused two sisters before me and, after 18 months of 'grooming' – during which time he progressed from kissing me to molesting me to digitally penetrating me – he raped me. It was 2 months before my 10th birthday.

Withdrawn and mistrustful, I have never known what a healthy, equal relationship is and several suicide attempts in my twenties were expressions of my feelings of worthlessness and self-loathing. A further attempt to kill myself when I was 39 years old led me to seek therapy and three years into a process which has now lasted for 7 years, I decided to report my abuse and rape to the police. This was in April 2009.

The police charged my abuser in November 2009. Early in 2010, one of his other victims decided that she too would make a statement and the Procurator Fiscal's Office (PFO) commenced its investigations. In October 2010, we both endured the precognition stage of this investigation and, in January 2011, he faced petition charges. The process continued to a video identity parade in April 2011 and precognition with his defence team in September 2011. In October 2011 we were informed that the Crown Office had decided to prosecute my abuser and I was read the 5 indictment charges which he faced in relation to me. The first preliminary hearing on 2nd November 2011 continued to another on 1st December 2011 to another 8th January 2012 when yet another date – 24th January – was set. He continued to deny the charges and his defence team used many legal strategies to delay the setting of a trial date but after the 4th continuation, a date was set for 17th April 2012 at Glasgow High Court. A

date almost exactly 3 years on from my making of a statement to the police.

His solicitors continued to use as many strategies as possible – including delayed disclosure in March 2012 – and finally the strategies, the delays and the manner in which information was communicated to us by the Victims Advice and Information officer proved too much for the other victim and she withdrew from the case 2 weeks before the trial date.

I was informed by the PFO on the 8th April 2012 that the case no longer met the Scots Law requirement for corroboration but that the Lord Advocate would now consider if there was any way in which we could legally proceed on my evidence alone. At 10.30am on the day that the trial was due to commence, I received a telephone call informing me that there was no possibility of proceeding and that the case was therefore dismissed.

I was devastated – what my abuser did to the child I was shaped and formed the adult that I am. Decades of woundedness and trauma have ingrained within me such mistrust of the touch and love of others that I remain trapped in a desolate hollow, never having experienced again the innocent happiness of my pre-abuse childhood.

I was also angry. What is this Scots Law corroboration madness? There must be 2 sources of evidence – 2 victims not just 2 pieces of evidence – before a case can proceed? How on earth then does a rape victim – alone with their rapist and too fractured to preserve forensic evidence – get justice in Scotland?

My evidence constituted 'single source' and the other victim was then the 'second source' which the Law required. Within my evidence 'bundle' will have been my

Colette Barrie: My Story



medical records and my counselling records - the latter of which I was forced to consent to release to the Crown otherwise they would have served a Warrant on my therapist. Both sets of records clearly illustrate the fact that I have been talking about – and have been affected by - my abuse for many years prior to making my statement to the police. This was no ‘made up’ story and I had been told several times – by the police and by the PFO - that I was a credible witness.

Yet, owing to the requirement and definition in Scots Law of corroboration, my abuser was now never going to be faced with my truth? Never going to be held to account for what he has done to me?

This is completely and morally wrong. So, in the wake of my case being dismissed and with the intention of challenging this requirement, I decided to research this aspect of Scots Law.

My Campaign

I was delighted to find that, in Nov 2010, Lord Carloway had been commissioned by the Scottish Parliament to review all aspects of the Scottish Criminal Justice System and that, within his review report which had been published in November 2011, he categorically states that the requirement for corroboration is archaic and medieval, Declaring that it has no place in a modern criminal justice system, Lord Carloway calls for its immediate abolition.

Colette Barrie: My Story

I decided that I would both raise awareness of the unfairness of the corroboration requirement and, promoting the findings of Lord Carloway's review, I would petition for its immediate abolition. Going one step further than Lord Carloway, I want the Act which decrees the abolition of corroboration to come into statute via retrospective legislation thus allowing for 'pre-Act' victims to be given the opportunity for justice.

I made my intentions known to the parliament contact for Lord Carloway, to the PFO, to the Advocate Depute involved in my case, to the Solicitor General, to the Lord Advocate and to the Minister for Justice.

I launched a website – www.abolishcorroborationnow.com – with the hope of both raising awareness and gathering support for my campaign.

I also discovered that the Scottish Parliament has a petitions section on its website and I contacted the relevant department and found out how to draft and lodge such a petition. This I then did on 22 June 2012. It can be found at: www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE1436.

Owing to the fact that my petition was lodged 3 days prior to the launch of the parliament's new 'e-petition' site which allows for on-line signatures, my petition was unable to collect on-line signatures. I therefore recreated the petition on Change.org. It can be found at www.change.org/petitions/come-on-scotland-give-victims-of-crime-full-access-to-justice

I allowed the petition to close when it had collected 100 signatures. I have recently reopened it with a new signature target of 1000.

Promoting My Petition

In order to raise awareness of my petition, I contacted several agencies whom I thought might be able to assist in promoting its aims. One of these agencies is Rape Crisis Scotland. Not only was their support immediate and powerful – generating the majority of signatures to date – but they are also the only agency to reply in such a positive manner.

I also joined Facebook so that I could harness the power of social media and I posted information and links to my petition on the pages of various community support agencies, social reform agencies and universities and colleges which declare an interest in Criminal Justice.

At the time of contacting him in April 2012, the parliament contact for Lord Carloway advised me that the parliament would, sometime later in 2012, launch a three months public consultation on the review report. He told me that he would let me know when this happened and this he did on 3rd July 2012, several days after I launched my petition on Change.org. I therefore made this known to those who signed the petition and posted it as an update to the petition itself.

The launch of the Public Consultation generated media interest and on 7th July 2012, I was contacted by Rape Crisis Scotland who asked if I would be willing to speak with a journalist, Lucy Adams, from The Herald (Scotland). I agreed to this and the interview was published on 28th July 2012. It can be found at:

www.heraldsotland.com/news/crime-courts/abuse-victim-campaigns-to-end-need-for-corroboration.18134576

I did not accept a fee for this interview and agreed to it in the hope that it would generate more support for my petition but,

Colette Barrie: My Story

sadly, this was not the case.

Throughout June and July 2012, I emailed Members of Scottish Parliament (MSPs) asking that they support my petition. I contacted some 37 of the 129 listed – I did not contact all of them owing to other commitments on my time.

Of the 37 I did email, 6 are in favour of the abolition of the corroboration requirement. None are willing to commit to the view that such abolition needs to be retrospective but neither do they disagree that it should be.

An example of the supportive replies received thus far:

I was appalled to hear about your situation and experience and extremely disappointed with your experience of Scottish Justice.

The treatment of women in the justice system has been an issue close to my heart for a number of years..... I am hopeful that the removal of corroboration will also help to increase the number of sexual assaults that are brought to trial and have enclosed statements made by Scottish Labour's Justice team on this issue below.

In terms of retrospection in principle I would be fairly supportive but would need to see the details of proposals before being able to offer unconditional support. I understand that with the removal of double jeopardy it may be possible to bring in a retrospective element and if it was practical and legal to do so I would be likely to support this.

I hope this reassures you as to my position on this matter and I sincerely hope that you are successful in your campaign for justice.

Progress Thus Far

On 27th August 2012, I was contacted by the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee clerk to advise me that my petition would be considered by the Public Petitions Committee at its meeting on Tuesday 4 September 2012.

On Tuesday 4th September, I was informed that the Public Petitions Committee had refereed the petition to the Justice Committee for consideration at their next meeting.

On 13th September 2012, I was contacted by the Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee clerk requesting if I would like to provide any further written information relating to the petition which I feel might be useful to the Committee. This I did and it can be found as a link in www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE1436.

On 25th September 2012, I was informed of the outcome of the Justice Committee's consideration of petition PE1436 on retrospective abolition of corroboration. The Committee agreed to keep my petition open, pending introduction of primary legislation to implement Lord Carloway's recommendations, including on corroboration.

It is clear from various reports in the media and now from the information in the email regarding the Justice Committee's consideration of my petition, that primary legislation regarding abolition of the corroboration requirement is indeed on its way.

This step towards bringing Scots Law into line with that practices by other civilised nations is overdue but, naturally, very welcome! I still believe that legislation abolishing corroboration needs to be retrospective also and, as

Colette Barrie: My Story

stated in my petition, the precedent for such exists in the passing of the Double Jeopardy (Scotland) Act 2011, whereby Scotland's law makers set the precedent for legislation which accommodates retrospective justice.

To quote direct from my petition-

'In making the Double Jeopardy (Scotland) Act 2011 retrospective, the legislators state that '....it is immaterial whether the conviction or, as the case may be, the acquittal was before or after the coming into force of the Act'.

Other examples of retrospective legislation are those Acts brought into statute in order to address War Crimes and Tax Avoidance. Both such Acts also decree that the timing of the offence in relation to the legislation is immaterial.

The same must apply to legislation which abolishes the corroboration requirement, It is immaterial whether the offence was committed before or after the coming into force of such legislation; what is material – what matters – is that the justice system punishes the guilty and protects the innocent.'

Next Steps

The Public Consultation process completed on the 5th October 2012 and we await publication of its findings.

I have found the process of actively pursuing – via my petition and website – abolition of this archaic requirement to have been a positive experience on several levels; taking action has helped to soothe some of the great distress inflicted by the abandonment of my case, the stories shared by some of those who signed my petition had been reaffirmed my commitment to pursue change and the support provided by Rape Crisis has been invaluable.

When I was abused, something in me froze and although there is some thawing and some lessening of the barriers erected to protect me, I remain trapped inside a hollow void in which trust and love struggle to survive. My journey through life is therefore a very lonely one and I am unused to people wanting to walk beside me, support me. That Rape Crisis does so – without conditions, without judgment – is very precious to me.

The Autumn of 2012 was difficult for me – for over a year, I had been in denial over my beloved mother's death and suddenly the grief, heartbreak and horror crashed over me like a tsunami.

I have therefore not been capable of giving any of my time a great many things, this campaign included. However, I have been functioning on some levels and am not oblivious to the fact that some very high profile historic sexual abuse cases have been much in the media of late and that there are current debates regarding what responsibilities our societies and law makers have towards protecting our most innocent and vulnerable.

The corroboration requirement is archaic and has no place in a modern criminal justice system. Rather than protect against miscarriages of justice, it creates them – for how can it be otherwise when, owing to this law, a victim of crime is denied justice whilst the perpetrator remains at liberty to offend again?

I would ask you to please lend your support to the call for new legislation which both abolishes this requirement and allows such abolition to be retrospective. Please sign the newly re-opened petition at: www.change.org/petitions/come-on-scotland-give-victims-of-crime-full-access-to-justice

Colette Barrie

16 Impacts of Sexual Assault

On each one the 16 Days of Action to Prevent Violence Against Women during 2010, Kate Ravenscroft published her thoughts on one of the many impacts of sexual violence.

We are privileged to reproduce two of these in this issue.

You can see all 16 Impacts of Sexual Assault at <http://16impacts.wordpress.com>.

Day 2. SHAME

The first feeling to emerge from the fog of shock is shame. And when it comes, it hits hard. Suddenly, the disorientation, the dullness and the emptiness give way to a searing, inescapable assessment of culpability along with an unbearable sensation of humiliation. You find yourself pinned down, struggling flame-cheeked and defenseless, under the oppressive load of millennia of misogynist, sexist values that whisper in your ear, incessantly, how could you let this happen? You feel uncovered, exposed, disgraced. Stripped bare by a stranger, in more ways than one, your dignity has been annihilated. You have been rendered worthless and the undeniable fact seems to be you should have known better, you should have seen it coming, you should have fought harder. After all, what is the first priority of womanhood? To protect your sexual value with your life. You failed. Where else to turn but self-blame?

When somebody treats you like a disposable object, useful for one purpose only and then able to be thrown away without a second thought, and when that view is so frequently reinforced by a culture that still values women for their sexuality first more often than not, shame at not being able to protect yourself from rape, to keep yourself safe,

is overwhelming and automatic. Girls are told from a young age that it is their responsibility to keep themselves safe, even though they are rarely trained or equipped to know how to do this. The devastating and overpowering message that goes with this is that when a woman's safety is jeopardized, it must, somehow or another, be her fault. No matter that I never believed this for a minute, nor that, if you had asked me my thoughts on such things, I would have argued ruthlessly and assertively that these ideas are not just plain wrong but are destructive and degrading, even criminal in their toxic capacity to strip women of their human rights. Despite all this, shame arrived on my doorstep unbidden, and just like the rapist, forced its way in without the slightest consideration for me or my well-being, let alone my rights.

Fortunately, I was surrounded by loving, caring, honest and brave people who did everything they could to disprove, dispel and counter the poisonous and insidious 'values' that make possible that terrifying sense of shame. It can never be said too often: no victim is ever responsible for their victimization. The only way rape can ever occur is when a rapist makes the choice to violate and assault another human being. There are no circumstances that can alter that fact. There are no excuses, no justifications and no defense. There is only ever one person responsible for rape and that is the rapist. If you ever encounter that creeping, creepy sense of shame in response to any infringement of your right to sexual autonomy, or any other human right for that matter, don't hesitate to counter it instantly and determinedly with these irrefutable truths. And if you don't feel strong enough just yet to do so, then go to someone who will do it for you, or read this, or contact me – don't give it even a moment of your precious time or energy. You're worth way too much to give shame anything.

16 Impacts of Sexual Assault

Day 14. LIFELINES

To be kind to another human being, simply because you can, simply because you care, is perhaps the greatest act one person can do for another. You might believe too much has happened to you. You may feel like a lost cause. It may simply seem like too much to bear, too much for any one person to take on.

The grief, the loss, the hurt, the terror – just as you resurface from the last dumping, gasping for breath, spluttering and coughing to get the water out of your lungs, your eyes red and stinging from the salt, the next wave is upon you. There is no time to get your bearings, no way to try and swim to less tumultuous territory, no opportunity to escape from that endless chain of waves breaking over you, burying you time after time in icy, salty, churning water. You're right – it is too much for anyone to bear – alone.

But, if you can find the determination, the strength – no matter how grim and futile it may seem, no matter how debilitated and fragile you might feel – to yell out, to wave your hands there is every chance that a lifesaver will appear on the scene. They may not be able to pull you out from those icy seas, but they can give you all sorts of assistance to help you keep your head above water. It won't take away the chill, nor will it prevent you from having to tread water tirelessly, but it will mean you begin that gradual drift towards calmer seas.

To rely upon the kindness of others can seem like a hopeless, dangerous, impossible act of faith in the aftermath of rape. How could you ever look to another person for support after such an experience of savagery? Once you know what human beings are capable of, how could you take that risk? The 'what ifs' can seem insurmountable. You know how much damage people are capable

of doing to each other, you know how brutal the consequences are. You cannot permit yourself to be exposed to anything that might run the risk of a repeat performance. How would you cope if you called out for help and received cruelty instead? Or worse, disinterest? It's a perfectly logical response.

Perhaps fortunately, though, life does not obey logic. A single act of kindness can change everything. It only takes one person, one relatively small act of support, one moment's concern and attention, for that life ring to be thrown your way. To tell someone what has happened and for them to take the time to listen to your story, for them to put aside their own reactions and truly hear yours, for them to reach out and say, "I believe you" – this can be the line that reconnects you to the world that was. To be believed, to be heard, to be taken seriously, to receive considerate, caring concern in response to your words – each one of these represents another lifeline, another buoyant object for you to hold onto, another life ring that relieves just a little of the work that you must do to keep afloat.

I did not believe I could take the risk of telling someone close to me. I was afraid of being judged for 'falling' out of the boat, I was afraid of being left to swim on alone. I believed that the risk was too great. I thought that maybe I could manage to keep treading water, that maybe that was the better choice. I was wrong – on all counts. Redirecting your energy from staying afloat to calling out for help is a risk but there are calculated ways to manage that risk. While I wasn't able, at first, to go to my family or friends, I did feel able to go to a professional. Many places in the world, there are now specialised lifesavers, people whose very job it is to give you the life rings you require to stay afloat. They listen. They find out what you need. They provide it

16 Impacts of Sexual Assault



'Sea Dream' by Aileen Carruthers
www.aileencarruthersart.co.uk

wherever they can. They can direct you to life buoys you never knew existed, connect you to lines all around you that you'd never have seen for the waves if someone hadn't taken the time to show them to you. When you let people help you, when you take that calculated risk of raising your hand to attract attention, not only do you help yourself, but you reenforce those lifesaving services, you reestablish a world in which people care for each other. You counteract directly the work of the rapist – and not just for your benefit, but that of everyone.

You cannot have too many lifelines. Considering how rough those seas are, how unpredictable, you cannot have too much support. Anything that minimises the amount of energy you use up staying afloat, anything that gives you buoyancy – take it. Whatever it is that permits you to regain a sense of control, a sense of strength, a sense of dignity

amongst those turbulent waters, make use of it. What each lifeline gives you is an awareness of your strength, they assist you to identify how exactly it is that, despite what should have pushed you under, you are still there kicking and fighting and breathing. You did hang in there, you will hang in there and, somehow, sooner or later, by virtue of your own determination you'll find yourself managing those seas with increased adeptness. The waves that used to pummel you, you'll find yourself rising up over them, the undertow that used to drag you out to dark, deep waters, you'll know how to swim out of its grip.

No one can tell you how to do it, or do it for you, there is no lifesaver who'll sweep in and whisk you off on a speed boat, but the strength and skill and confidence that you develop as you learn to negotiate those seas, no one can take those from you.

Kate Ravenscroft

Rape Crisis Scotland spoke to three women in Glasgow who recently set up their own peer support group, SEESAW.

Marguerite, Grace and Lisette (not their real names) spoke about how and why they established the group, and what they hope to achieve with it.

RCS: Would you like to say a bit about how SEESAW came into being?

Grace: Actually, my husband and I just sat – we were trying to think of a name, and the seesaw - the emotional imbalance and balance came to mind. But, as a group we put the words to what seesaw means...

Marguerite: Which is Survivors Empowering Educating and Supporting Abused Women. The reason we started is because the group here [in the Rape Crisis Centre] had been floundering really for about a year. We'd had various things - one-to-one support, ten weeks in a group. And then other people when they left groups were coming as well. I think there were about five of us for about a year, and we got on really well. We met every second Wednesday, and we would eventually self-facilitate. But more and more women joined the group as their ten-week course ended. And, instead of revisiting ground rules we started afresh every time. We just seemed to be going round in circles, not really progressing. There was no agenda. We came in, we didn't know what we were going to talk about, and eventually some of us got a bit frustrated, because we knew there were lots of things that we did want to do as a group, but we didn't really know how to go about it.

RCS: What sorts of things did you want to do?

Marguerite: We wanted to access things like creative writing, art therapy, because to talk about what we have been through is very difficult - I think we all feel you need to be guided. You need some help because it's just too traumatic to go into on your own. So, we wanted to access something like that. And, to address things like the law, changes in the law: how do we make change? How do we increase the conviction rate? And anything else that came up. But we didn't really have any focus. There were things that we wanted to do but we had no idea how to go about it. Until eventually Isabelle [the Centre Manager] said, "Have you ever thought about... setting up on your own?" And then, two weeks later she said "Have you given any more thought to that?" That was on a Wednesday, by the Friday we had a meeting place. By the Saturday we had our first meeting, and we've had fourteen meetings since. That was in November.

Now we have a constitution, we have an agenda every week, we are researching feminism. We're going to more conferences. We went to the latest one on corroboration last week, which was really, really powerful. There are only really four women who come regularly. There are eight that I send the Minutes out to. I'm the secretary. But, now we've decided that if the others aren't replying to Minutes or coming to any of the meetings we need to know if they want to be part of the group because we're now applying for funding, and they need to know how many members we are. Once we're established as a group we hope that other women are brought in as well.

Grace: My personal experience with the Rape Crisis Centre was in 2008. I went through the support programme. And at the end of that they were talking about trying to get a support group up and running. There was myself and another lady who

SEESAW

then joined a group, and then another group came in, and that ran well. We had activities around things like self-esteem and self-confidence, creative healing, creative writing that kind of thing. We met every fortnight. But, I would say that in my experience - when there was at one point seventeen women, it certainly became dysfunctional for more than a year.

RCS: Do you think there's an optimal number then for a group like this?

Marguerite: It'd just be small numbers initially—I don't think we're clear about how big we want it to grow because we're really just feeling our way week-by-week. But, as regards the large number of women, we did split into smaller groups. You just couldn't have a meeting of what we talk about with seventeen women. But there would be three rooms available, and the outside space. So, we'd split into groups of three or four. But I would've preferred it if it was topic-led rather than some person wanting to talk about something. So, it would develop into talkers, and listeners, and it would tend to be the same people. And, I don't think that's healthy when it's repeating every time you come.

Whereas now we're in control totally of our group, we know what we want to discuss, we have an agenda that we follow, and we can see clearly that we're making progress. Even although we've had no experience ourselves of anything like this, of self-facilitating, and we've had to be clear. We're still hammering out what exactly we mean by empowerment, education, and support. And, we're clear that we're not therapists, we don't offer that kind of support to other women. It's more just... women being there—who have lived the experience, and that's what we can offer other women as well. We actually know what we're talking about with the terms that are used in this, like

guilt, and shame, and terror, and we know because we have experienced it. In the last year especially, even prior to Jimmy Savile and everything that blew up then, every other day there's something in the news about rape, child abuse, grooming. And, without this group I don't know what I would do, because it is overwhelming, because your ears are attuned—you pick up the word rape you can't help it. Having this group... we can talk about Frances Andrade and how appalled we are. Just as an aside, at a recent meeting in the city halls, a seminar when they said, "Well no a woman doesn't get ripped to shreds." I just wanted to shout, "Frances Andrade." If that isn't being ripped to shreds when you're called a "fantasist" and a "liar". Your entire experience that you know is true has been nullified. That to me is being ripped to shreds. I wish I'd had the courage to say that, but I didn't.

Lisette: It's just having that safe space to sit and be with other women that you know have to some extent struggled the way that you have – not necessarily in exactly the same way. But even though we might have families, we might have close friends, we don't feel comfortable necessarily talking with that stuff with them. So it's absolutely necessary that there are groups like this, it's got huge benefits having peer-support in an environment like this. I mean we do all have times where we struggle, you know ups, and downs. But, the fact is—even if we don't necessarily say a lot just knowing that we understand each other, and that support's there - that's enough, you know. It means everything at times, definitely.

Marguerite: And you tell as much, or as little as you want.

Grace: And nobody judges you. It's one of the few places, in fact probably the only place that you can actually be yourself to a certain extent.

RCS: You talked about empowerment - is the idea of empowerment important to what you're doing? And, what does that mean to you in terms of how your group's working?

Lisette: It is yeah – having been either been abused as an adult, or as a child your power's taken away from you, and that's so difficult to get back. So, being empowered is something that we feel really, really strongly about. But, there's so much we need to learn about it.

Marguerite: And, I think it's about tackling the justice system too. I don't think we'll ever stop violence against women in any form. But, I want to see the consequences of being violent to women and children, the whole culture - changed. And one of the real ways of doing that is by improving the conviction rates. At the moment, we don't really know how to go about it - we have a list of aims and objectives, and it's one of the things that we have a question mark beside, because at the moment we're concentrating on funding, we're concentrating on just getting the group up and running, and on a solid footing. But, these are the things that we will have to, and we will find out how to do it as we grow. So, that would be really empowering, helping to contribute to a change in the law.

Lisette: And, consciousness-raising as well because so many people are just accepting. But, ultimately the blame lies at the perpetrator.

Marguerite: But that's a real tough nut to crack, because we're so culturally drenched in the idea that it's up to the woman to prevent rape, instead of men not to rape. And, that's a huge difference in thinking that we need to get inside, that default position in society.

Grace: Regarding empowerment I agree

with Lisette, and Marguerite. Within the group actually it's about women that have experienced child abuse and rape. And, we're kind of finding that there's two strands, you know. At the moment, I'm going through a personal crisis with flashbacks. But, I'm empowering myself with the knowledge of the inner child, the different stages of development. I might be sitting here calm, but it's been a month of hell. I've been hanging on by my fingernails. But, the fact is that knowledge is empowerment. I won't do any healing techniques without a professional person - I'm waiting for that. But, the fact is that to be able to understand the development stages when they're stunted through dysfunctional family, alcoholism, incest and rape, how much damage that does, dissociating your adult self, and your child self. This is something, you know that as a group you're dealing with if you're dealing with women who have gone through child abuse. There's going to be a strand there that's necessary to look at – that's just my personal experience, the last few weeks. But getting the knowledge is quite empowering. Does it make it easy? It does sometimes, but when you waken up and your day starts and you're hanging on in there – no. But you know your coping mechanisms, and you know to get on in there. You know, so... you know that's empowerment.

Marguerite: I think even just dealing with it yourself without even doing anything further is empowering instead of ignoring it for thirty years. You know, actually addressing it, and for all that it's a very slow, slow process. But thanks to the Rape Crisis Centre, we've been fortunate enough to be able to come here for four years. And it's not "you have to deal with this within a certain timeframe, and we'll look at this, that..." The pace is dictated by you, and how much you're able to reveal or deal with, and I think why we want to go forward is because we know

there are things that we still have to deal with that we haven't been able to.

For example it gives you the ability to read books that you weren't able to read before. I wouldn't touch anything to do with rape before. But, now I can read books that aren't directly connected to it. But, for example what I'm reading just now is 'The Sadeian Woman' by Angela Carter, and that is throwing up loads of that stuff that makes sense, about how the psyche itself is affected, that it's fragmented, and that goes against everything else that I've ever read, that "oh he didn't get to your soul..." you know, "it was just physical". Actually, it wasn't, and it's only now that I can say, "well no, it wasn't." And, this is what I've felt all the time, but I've never had any validation of that because I've never spoken about it. But, to see something that makes sense, makes you want to take it forward as well. But, again, at your own pace, at a slow pace.

Lisette: Even with the recent general discussions, and Jimmy Savile case, there's still such a huge stigma, and taboo about discussing adult rape, child rape, abuse - people don't want to hear it. They literally would run screaming if you were to try. I'm not saying that it should be on everybody's agenda, but when somebody comes along to share what's happened to them, it's not just going to go away in ten sessions. Once you've opened that Pandora's Box, it could go on for years, because this might be something you've not addressed for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, more years. So once you've done it, you've got a duty of care to kind of still have that door open for you to be able to come because it's not just gone like that. So these [rape crisis] centres are incredibly necessary, you know so... We appreciate it, definitely appreciate it.

RCS: You talked about your aims, and objectives, and, you've got a sort of

timeframe for certain things? What sorts of things might that include?

Marguerite: Well, we want to collaborate with other woman's groups.

Grace: Self-confidence and self-esteem classes, in small numbers. And creative writing, or even something as simple as going to the local colleges where girls are just doing beauty therapy and hairdressing. Where they could come and cut the women's hair, and do their nails, because there's some women that haven't stepped outside their door - never, you know. Sort of pampering things, to balance it all - the activism, the support, the creativity, the healing. And, if someone wanted to have a chat with any group member who was willing - not counselling, a chat - that too could happen. Where it was understood, you know, first and foremost that we weren't counsellors, we're peers.

RCS: Would you describe yourselves as feminist? Do you see that as something that's important to you?

Marguerite: I wouldn't have a year or so ago, but I would now, and I think it is important. But there are so many different feminist camps! I went to a conference in Glasgow a few months ago, and it was radical feminism, which does not appeal to me at all. I mean it was really interesting, and there were bits that I liked. But, to come out with such extreme views...because we're not man-haters - far from it. I have no respect for men who abuse but as for the rest of men, fine. There are only men and women - there's only two of us. I don't like having a philosophy that's based on hatred. So that kind of feminism doesn't mean anything to me. There are so many books... I've only read 'The Female Eunuch', and 'The Second Sex', and I read them decades ago. Germaine Greer I think turned me

off feminism. She was on TV, late one night about thirty years ago – it was some chat show, and she said that she'd been raped, it was a date-rape, and she said, well you know, "just get over it." And, I thought this icon of feminism is saying something so trite, and I really turned my back on feminism. And also because I thought it was probably a middle-class concept as well.

RCS: *That's interesting.*

Marguerite: Working women have worked out of necessity, it wasn't choice. So I need to address that as well. So yes, I'm happy to say I'm a feminist, but there are things that I just I don't know enough about. I want to read Betty Friedan, 'The Feminine Mystique'. My mother was a working mother, because she was a widow, she had to - it wasn't Betty Friedan who told her, "go and study, and become a teacher". It was financial necessity. I don't think she would ever have said she was a feminist. I think we just took it for granted we were feminists. In that we believed in our equality, if not superiority to men. I saw 'Made in Dagenham' the other night and I can remember in 1968 equal pay - women were going out with banners for equal pay, and the Equal Pay Act only came in in 1970 because of those women. Now, Britain is slipping down a league of tables for equality in pay.

Lisette: I think we all deserve equality, respect, and choice. Because there are stay at home mums and there are working women, and it shouldn't matter what you're doing that's the thing. I brought up my kids. I was there at home. My husband worked, and I do remember feeling like a lesser person because you know, "oh you're not working" you know? But, it wasn't necessarily a choice - there were childcare issues - maybe I would've done it if it'd been easier. But, the fact is a

lot of women judge each other, it's not just men making it difficult.

Marguerite: I think there's a lot that needs to be done to reclaim the word feminism.

Grace: I think for me personally it's something that I'm just exploring. I have no idea. I've been with the same man for thirty-two years. I have a boy, and a girl. I don't want my boy to be hated, you know? He's a charming young gentleman. My daughter is a force to be reckoned with. I broke the cycle, you might say, in raising my children. So, I don't know if I am a feminist. I look forward to finding out. Without a doubt it's difficult when you're married to the same person - you think 'do I fit into feminism? Do I fit in?' You know that'll be interesting.

RCS: *Do you think the internet, and in particular social media has a useful place for survivors, and maybe for your group?*

Marguerite: That's another thing that we're thinking of - a website, but again it's one of the question marks, because we're not really sure. We think personal stories would be good, but actually, I would find it very, very hard to write my personal story. And every single woman's experience is unique.

Lisette: Last night I typed in NAPAC – National Association of People Abused in Childhood with Peter Saunders, and there are a lot of personal stories on that, which I found difficult to read. There's a lot of creative writing on it, some really good stuff. And there's another one - I think based in America - called 'Pandora's Project'. And, that's the thing - it doesn't matter whether you're in Scotland or in America - there's a common denominator.

Marguerite: And, if you can't get out the house, it is fantastic. So, that is something

that we will consider but we're very, very hazy about it just now.

RCS: Do you see yourselves as part of a wider rape crisis movement?

Marguerite: We've filled in a form for 'Awards for All' and one of the questions was, "are you part of a larger organisation?" And I think we want to say, "yes we are." But, in terms of funding we are autonomous. So, in that sense no, for funding, because we're doing everything on our own. We've got our own constitution, we'll have our own policies. But, I think we will always consider ourselves part of Rape Crisis, because it's Rape Crisis that gave us the opportunity. We wouldn't be doing what we're doing were it not for Rape Crisis.

RCS: Are they going to ask you if you will take women on, or is it going to be up to you to say when you feel ready maybe to take someone else into your group? How does that work?

Grace: When we're ready - we'd kind of said we'd give ourselves a year to establish, and take it from there. It might even be sooner, but we're not really sure yet.

Lisette: As far as premises are concerned, we don't know how long we're definitely going to have that space. We have spoken to someone who's going to help us with the funding and we're having another meeting with her in a few weeks' time, so, that might make things a bit clearer. She herself said "even once you've got the funding a few more months after that, get yourselves in a good place. Work out exactly what you're going to do, and then at that point..." Hopefully if Rape Crisis are willing to signpost women onto us, then we'll be in a good place at that point.

Marguerite: The Women's Library, which has moved or is in the process of moving was our first port of call when we were looking for premises, because you've got so many facilities on hand and resources. The woman I was speaking to said, "come back in a few months, because we're in a state of flux just now." So, that would be ideal really to be housed in the women's library, because it's a woman-only space. So we need to find out if we can, if that's a possibility because I don't know if they open on a Saturday afternoon. That's when we meet.

Lisette: Although we don't have to stick to a Saturday if it was going to be beneficial, or suitable for everybody, we can change things. If that space was there, and it was going to be a better place to meet then we can be flexible.

RCS: If someone else came to you, say in another city, who wanted to start up a group like this, what advice would you give them? What would you be saying to them?

Marguerite: Go for it with passion, just do. Week-by-week you're building on what you've done the week before. And know what you want to do - spend a lot of time talking about that. Having a focus.

Grace: And pacing yourself, and recognising that it can't be done in a couple of months. You have to, as Isabelle said, you know, "take a year, and you'll be absolutely grounded," you know your foundation will be solid. But go for it, yeah.



'Amaryllis' by Aileen Carruthers
www.aileencarruthersart.co.uk

Rape Crisis Scotland, Tara House, 46 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 1HG
www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk
Email: info@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk
Helpline 08088 01 03 02