

26/09/13

Dear Commissioner,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I now consider this foster family *my family*. [REDACTED] It was the brother 6 years older who during his 15th and 16th years involved me in his sexual proclivities. At the time I found the non invasive intimacy desirable as I wanted this special bond with him, wanted to be loved. As he got older his attention turned to girls his own age and the occurrences stopped.

What impact did this have on me? In my early teens it became clear that I had “skills” that my peers did not. This got me a “reputation” and meant that girls saw me as a threat. In hindsight I would say I was a promiscuous teen. Every 3-6 months I was interviewed by DoCS and interestingly none of the reports reflect any of these behaviours. I was very skilled in presenting as the perfect happy child in order to not be sent away.

In my 30s as a married adult I started experiencing post traumatic stress in the form of gagging whenever I had sex with my husband. It was at this time I sought professional counselling and worked through my childhood experiences. Things are much better now... thanks for asking.

I am not an expert in this field, nor do I have the answers. I do have a happy life, a wonderful husband and child. However thinking about why this happened has consumed a large portion of time. For a crime to be committed you need motive and opportunity. In my case the motive was pretty easy to determine – it was so he could have heightened sexual gratification. What teenage boy isn't into that?

As for opportunity... the older kids had moved out of home and he was left to babysit me while Mum and Dad were out. We could remove the opportunity and insist that no foster child is ever only looked after by one person but then we start to get into the realm of “no male can sit next to an unaccompanied minor on a flight” which assumes the worst in all people. Surely we can be more proactive, positive and upfront about what we expect from foster families than that.

The question I ask is, given this opportunity would he have abused a natural sister 6 years younger? I don't believe so. He had given himself permission because a) I was not a blood relation and therefore in his mind it wasn't incest and b) if discovered, his family would side with him and I would be sent away, so I wouldn't say a thing.

So in the spirit of “being a part of the solution” here are some things that could be done (maybe they already are):

- 1) Educate foster parents about the type of people that take advantage of children in out of home care and what behaviours they exhibit eg. alone time, grooming. Discuss why foster children are more vulnerable and an easier target than natural children. In the media we hear a lot about Institutional child abuses but we forget the most common abusers are not priests but family and friends. Skill parents to protect foster/all children from predators.
- 2) When the governing body (in my case DoCS) screens foster parents, flag if they have other children and as those children hit puberty go back and have the uncomfortable talk. Discuss what is age appropriate, behaviourally normal, where the line is and what crosses the line. Remove their permissions and explain the consequences.
- 3) Build this uncomfortable talk into school sex ed. I hate to imagine the increase in these kinds of abuses given the increase in the number of blended families. A discussion for another decade perhaps...

I truly appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts on your Issues Paper and hope that my experience and my simple contribution may assist in creating a pathway forward so others are not negatively impacted by sexual abuse when placed in out of home care. You are welcome to read my government file and/or make contact for further information or discussions. My details are on the email and are not for public consumption.

Good luck with this admirable quest.