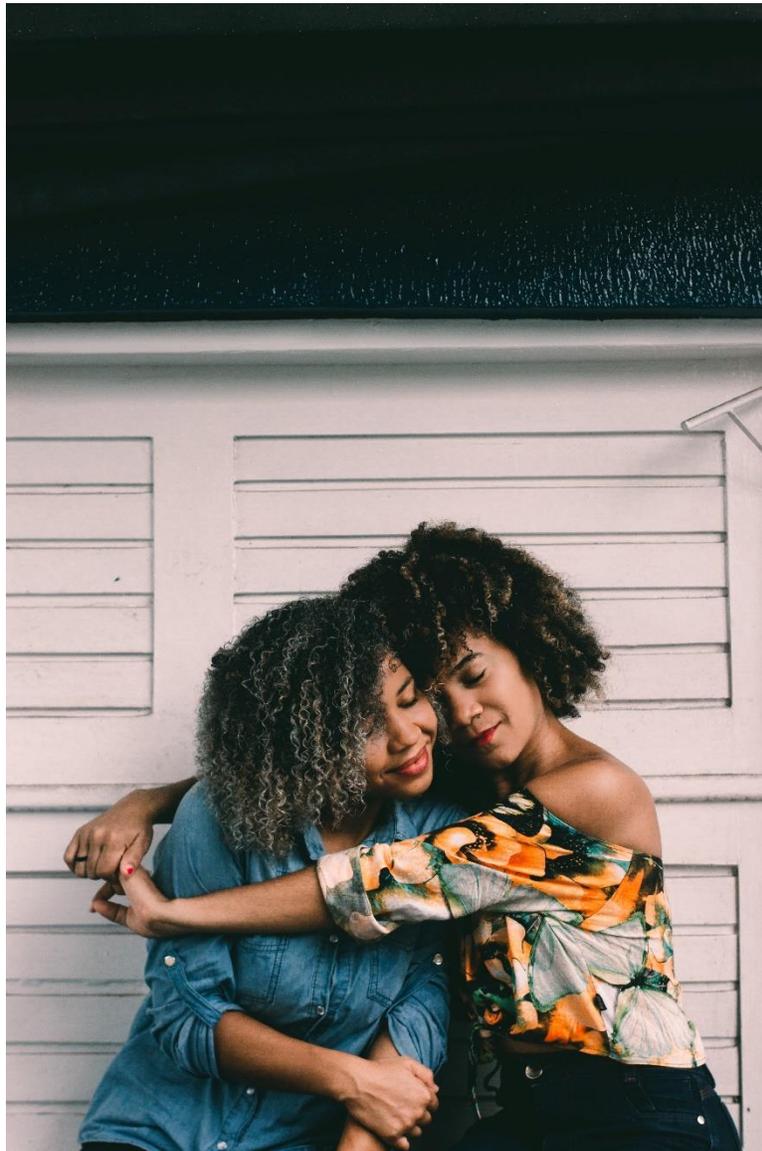


2020 Survivor Journal: *Living As A Survivor*



Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) 2020 kicked off with our second annual *Living As A Survivor* campaign. During the month of April survivors had the opportunity to anonymously submit to us their stories. So many brave survivors entrusted us with their stories. For some, this is the first time their

survivor story has been told. Survivor stories have powerful healing power both for the survivor telling the story and for others who read it. To tell your survivor story is empowering. Thank you to all the courageous survivors who shared their stories and used our platform to *regain their voice*. We believe you. We hear you. We are here for you. You are not alone.



**TRIGGER
WARNING**

The following content may be triggering
for survivors of sexual assault.

 Regain Your Voice

Survivor Story #1

I have had a long trauma history. Throughout the years, I've been able to see the beauty of growth through pain. I have learned that I will have bad days but that there is never defeat. I have learned to never fall out of love with myself and that nothing I have been through can take away my beauty. There are

people out there who will love you for you, despite trauma telling us otherwise. Stay strong and always reach out when you need it.

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Survivor Story #2

My abuser is a successful physician and was my employer. He threatened my life, had private investigators following me, physically pinned me down by my throat and threatened my life, threatened my job daily, forced me to preform sexual acts on him and then just when I thought it couldn't get worse, it did. He came into my office one day and locked the door behind him. He approached me and grabbed me by the throat. Squeezing tightly, he said, "You want to keep your job, don't you!" It was statement not a question. He had previously threatened my life in specific ways.

He turned me around and pushed me down onto my desk, aggressively pulling my scrub pants down, and forced himself inside me - sodomizing me. I felt as though I was having an out of body experience. I cried and said please stop. He held me down by the back of my neck, his hand nearly wrapped around my neck entirely, his fingertips at the front of my throat pressing so hard that breathing was becoming difficult. After he finished, he said five words that I would come to hear many more times. He turned and left like nothing happened.

As I lie there bent over my desk crying, thinking did this really just happen to me??? What do I do now.....? What do I do? I pulled my pants up, went to the bathroom looked in the mirror and didn't recognize myself. What just happened? What was just taken from me? More than I knew at that moment. My entire life as I knew it was just taken from me. Someone else was now in control of my life.

I washed off the mascara that was running down my face. I washed myself everywhere and went back into my office and sat there staring at my computer lost in a daze. I was broken and didn't know where to turn or what to do. The threats on my job weren't just threats on my job, they were threats on my livelihood - on my life - and he had the means to do it. A psychopath had control of my life and my body.

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Survivor Story #3

A Year Ago Today

Because you were my colleague

My teammate

My friend

I trusted you.

We went to university together for two semesters

Classes together studying law brought us together

Solidified by our team membership on mock trial

We became friends, fast.

You were goofy, with a boyish charm

A funny person in the room

I felt comfortable near you

Someone I grew to trust.

I had never smoked weed before

Thought about it and decided to try it

Tried it with no effect

Our friend invited me over to smoke from her bong.

You, my friend, and I went to her apartment

Smoked weed I got from a friend

It was hilarious, we had so much fun

I laid on the floor as the walls spun.

Next day

it was the 2 of us at her place

Same story

lots of weed and laughter

I was so far gone

my second time ever high

You knew it and you waited.

You may not have created the opportunity

Maybe it was my fault for getting high

But it wasn't my fault for what you did with it

When you came over later and stopped being my colleague,

My teammate,

My friend.

Because friends don't wait for incapacitation

Because friends don't push boundaries

Because friends don't look for opportunities
To violate their friends.

But that's what you did
When I needed food
You came over with chips
And left a rapist.
I told the school
And they didn't care
They kicked me out of class
For your comfort.
Your comfort.
It's always been about your comfort.
Were you comfortable when you raped me?
I was not.
But you were lucky:
The school and police believed you over me.

It helps that our friend lied
To cover up for your mess.
And let's not forget my friend
Who could not be bothered
To return the voicemail from the police
Because she was just too busy.
You told the police I was engaged
Among many other lies
You used all the same excuses as my first rapist
After pulling that police report.
You knew I'd look like a liar
Because I was a victim before
You used it to your advantage
A professional at taking advantage.

But I'm not your victim anymore
It's been a whole year.
I'm sure you haven't forgotten what you did
Even though you got away with it.
I haven't forgotten what you did to me
The turmoil you caused in my life
The negative ripple of affects you caused
When you chose to rape me.
But I'm a successful law student now
I found my calling because of you
When I earn my JD, despite you,
I will advocate against this inequity.

Rapists like you will no longer be protected
By uneducated Title IX Coordinators
Like ours who protected you
By violating Title IX.
Because people like me, who you so stupidly underestimated,
Will change the world.
And rapists like you, who skate by thanks to daddy and the broken cracks in
the system,
You'll be held accountable one day.
Because unjust rulings and decisions regarding rape and sexual assault
Won't protect rapists like you
Forever.

You were my colleague,
My teammate,
My friend,
Someone I trusted.
Now you're just a bad dream.
A nightmare,
A mistake of trust,
My rapist.
And to my Title IX Coordinator:
You're the worst of all.
Your ignorance of the law and Title IX protected my rapist and put thousands
of other students at risk.
I hope you lose your job.
A year has passed. You hold no power over me anymore.

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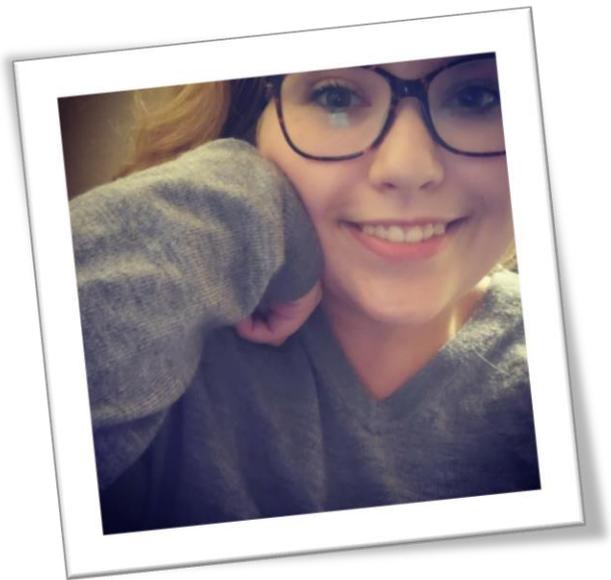
Survivor Story #4

My ex used to be my best friend. He saved me in my darkest times with my family. However, one night I was at a mate's place and drank. I grew up Christian (and still am), so I was taught to never have boys stay over. Well, I was house sitting with him (as I couldn't live at home). Normally, I would sleep on the lounge and he had the bed, but for some reason unknown to me, I decided to sleep in the bed. He woke me up and said, "I'm so sorry I humped you in your sleep." I'm a deep sleeper and so I wasn't fully awake. So I turned over and went back to bed. Next minute, I'm woken up again. (Now this time I'm awake). And he said, "I'm so sorry I've done it again." It dawned on me what happened. But it was like 3:00 am. I had no way to get home, so I slept on the lounge until morning. Now, this may not be as bad as it could have

been. And I'm incredibly grateful for that. I just wish I could be free of that memory. It affects me daily knowing that despite how intimidating I try to make myself I never know if it will happen again. I was on a packed train and had a panic attack cause I had to sit for 1 hour with my legs together near a man's crotch because he was manspreading. I wish nothing as simple as what happened to me on anyone (even my worst enemy) and especially nothing worse.

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Chloe's Survivor Story



Storytelling has always been deep in my soul, the act of stitching words together a salve for my soul. No matter what happened, the ability to create despite it made it seem almost – dare I say – worth it. I liked to write hard and real about the things in life that hurt and then finish them off with a silver lining or a lesson. It always seemed to help, and it came quite easy. But in more recent years, though I long to, writing has felt more like a chore than the therapeutic thing it used to be. I wanted to write this to share, but just the thought of sitting down to do it made me feel like the invisible ropes that bind me were tightening. I told my therapist how difficult it is to think about, much less attempt to write out my whole story – something I've only done for a police report, which was anything but lovely or therapeutic. I expressed my frustration over one of my biggest joys and possible talents being robbed from

me. Haven't I lost enough? Why is it so hard to write a cohesive story with any meaning? She went on to talk about how trauma effects the brain and how what I am experiencing is quite normal, and then encouraged me to at least try to sit and write it out. Even if it's not perfectly cohesive or even chronological, it will be my story and it will be the first step on a journey to "learn" to write again; moreover, to *regain my voice* and the ability to share my story on my own terms. Maybe that is a disclaimer of sorts or my own way of saying "I'm not sure what's about to come out on this page or how eloquent it will be, but it will be true and it will be mine."

Once upon a time not so long ago, in a land that I still live in, I loved and I trusted. He wasn't the ideal prince charming that I had always dreamed of, but he was hard and real – just like the things I loved to write. He had a childhood similar to mine – riddled with the effects of drugs, sexual abuse, and emotional neglect. Upon leaving home and going to college, I had found myself ashamed of my childhood, but with him, I didn't have to feel ashamed. I wasn't worried that he would see me different because of what had happened to me, we seemed to have an understanding about the cruelty of the world and were just two souls trying to make it all "worth it." I found that my faith in Christ and loving others worked wonders. It's hard to be bitter when you are living loved and loving others. Despite my lingering shame, I felt a great sense that my redemption and restoration were playing out a little bit every day. If my coping was open handed, his was close-fisted. Where so many times before he had been the victim, now, he was powerful enough to be the one in control. He sought control of his own experience (mood, affect, and energy) with drugs and others through anger. I suppose our intense connection and dramatically different approaches to life created the perfect storm.

As our relationship progressed, his urges did too. And rather than controlling himself, he chose to control me. As I white knuckled my waistband, he pried my fingers off. He held me by my waist and laid his massive self over my legs so that I could not move. I stammered "no no no... what are you doing" over and over again and attempted to push him away by his shoulders. He just laughed at my futile attempts. It felt as though I was trying to move a mountain. I began to breathe harder and started to suck air as my reality was setting in – I was at his mercy, which is a horrid situation to be when the person does not have mercy in their heart. Sensing my panic, he attempted to "calm" me down. He moved up my body and grabbed my wrists, pinning them down behind me as he hovered over my face. He said my name a few times. "Chloe, I'm going to need you to calm down." He said it so calm and cool with an eerie smile spread across his face. I froze in terror. It felt as though my brain switched off. Keeping his firm grasp on my wrists, he finished what he had started.

Over the next week this continued daily, sometimes multiple times a day. I did not consent, but I did not fight either. I knew that panicking only made it more

physical. If I was just quiet, it would pass “without incident” in my mind. In a moment of clarity, I realized that what he was doing was criminal. I never wanted to be a rape victim or admit that I was. It took a long time for me to understand just how bad what had happened was and just over a year to report it to the police.

Legally, I did not get justice, but I took control of the situation, and that means a lot in my book. The local police department understood the severity of the situation, but the DA did not. He was not even given a slap on the wrist. I was granted a very temporary (two week) restraining order after the harassment continued for over a year. Since then, he has stayed on his side of town and I have finally been able to work towards healing on my side. I still find my faith in Christ and loving others works wonders. And I go to therapy now. Most days are a battle in some way, but it’s a battle worth fighting. Peace, faith, hope, and love are always worth fighting for. And every victory is worth celebrating – even if that victory is going grocery shopping without having a panic attack.

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 8:37-39

Nor rape.
Nor panic attack.
Nor PTSD.
Nor failed justice system.

My two-word story: Living Loved.

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