

## **Living on an Empty Tank of Love**

Had there been a Child Advocacy Center like Childrenz Haven fifty years ago when former board member, Jane Doe\*, was three years old, perhaps the abuse might not have occurred. But back then there was no recognition that family members would sexually prey on their own children. Jane's father began to sexually abuse Jane when she was three and her brother, Bill\*\*, from at least the age of five. As early as age 3, Jane made it a habit to go to bed fully dressed hoping that not wearing pajamas would somehow stop the abuse. But her dad stalked her anyway.

Not only did he sexually abuse his children, but he physically and verbally abused his wife. With four sons and one daughter, the mother found solace and a way to keep involved through the school PTA, thus leaving her children home in the evening with their father.

That's one of the things that Jane remembers: the dread she felt whenever her mother left for those PTA meetings. Jane would beg her mother to let her go, too, but her mother, acting amused, would explain that children were not allowed at the meetings.

At a very young age, Jane's father would make Jane and Bill play pool. They had a pool table. "If you lose," he'd say, "you've got to take off some of your clothes." Strip Pool, with your young children.

In elementary school, Jane became very withdrawn and scared. Jane remembers being sent to a speech pathologist and a hearing doctor in the third grade. No one could understand why she was so quiet.

"Shut down," she explained, "was just not understood back then."

If the teachers began to suspect a problem, if they began to ask too many questions, the father would simply move the family. Another rural area, another pipeline job. His only goal: to keep up the abuse unencumbered.

Luckily, in junior high, Jane discovered basketball. That helped. She played on the team. She stayed late, arrived at school early, whatever it took to stay away from her home. By age 17, Jane was ready to leave. She planned to go away for college, maybe even get a basketball scholarship. But then her mother ended up in the hospital with what appeared to be severe arthritis at a fairly young age. But Jane and her brothers knew the truth – the arthritis was actually the result of repeated beatings by her husband. After her mom was released from the hospital, Jane left for college. Scarcely a month had gone by when she got a letter from her mother's mother, "Your mother needs you, please come home," the grandmother explained.

So home Jane returned. Once again she became her father's prey. He insisted that no door could be locked. She shoved furniture in front of her door. All night he would attempt and sometime succeed in entering the room and raping her. Even at 17, even as a basketball player, she was no match for her father.

Finally, mercifully, Death came to her mother in 2003. Staying with her abusive husband for the better part of 60 years, the mother died with open wounds, confined to a wheelchair, being "taken care of" by that very man.

And then finally, finally, Jane's father died just recently. Jane stayed with him to the end.

“Why?” I asked, “wasn’t he sent to prison?”

The question haunted Jane. She knew I didn’t understand. When a person you are completely dependent upon sexually preys upon you when you are too young to process the behavior and too dependent to run away, you do not call the police on that person.

“Does this happen often in Polk County?” I asked her when she first told me the details. “Absolutely,” Jane replied. “My father moved us out here on purpose, he knew he would be “safe” out here where he would be left alone.”

Who can help weed this behavior out of our society? All of us. Those who have been abused, speak up. The abusers count on you remaining silent. Teachers can be taught to recognize the signs of abuse. Teachers, counselors, everyone can be educated.

Childrenz Haven is dedicated to educating the public about the sexual abuse of children. Equipped with skilled forensic interviewers trained to interview children, our goal is to make sure that no child falls through the cracks. With the financial assistance of county, state and federal funds and with the generous support of the community, we are hoping to make the difference in the lives of these abused children. Ultimately, we want no more tragedies like Jane’s.

If you would like to help, please send a donation to Childrenz Haven at 602 East Church St. Box 13 Livingston, Texas 77351 or visit our website and donate online at [www.childrenzhaven.org](http://www.childrenzhaven.org). In fact, one anonymous benefactor has promised to match any funds raised this year up to \$20,000.

You can also join us at our annual fundraisers: a Gala on February 7, 2013; a Run for Victims sponsored by the District Attorneys’ Office on April 6, 2013 and our Bass and Bugs fishing tournament and crawfish boil on May 4, 2012.

Once Jane buried her father, she decided to move away. With all her worldly possessions piled into her car and trailer, Jane took off this summer to find a new home in a new state far removed from fifty years of pain.

“I was blown away when you asked why my dad wasn’t in jail,” she explained to me some time back. “I am upset I never could—and I have to live with the guilt of not getting him there. It is my fault, I take full responsibility for it. I live on an empty tank of love now.”

\*Although the real Jane Doe told me I could use her real name, I have chosen to use this pseudonym;

\*\* Bill is also not her brother’s real name.