



The RESOURCE

Newsletter of the National Sexual Violence Resource Center

Fall/Winter 2005

Recollections of a Hurricane

LaFASA Director Recounts Katrina's Devastation

By
Judy Benitez

In the following piece, the Executive Director of the Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault (LaFASA) presents a revealing and moving glimpse into the devastation that touched so many lives in the Gulf Coast region as a result of Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. With journal-type entries, Judy Benitez tells us about the impact this disaster had on her life and her family and friends, and about her deep concerns, as a coalition director, regarding the sexual victimization of residents and evacuees and for the programs in storm-ravaged areas.

Saturday, Aug. 27, Dad's birthday: My friend and co-worker Misty and her new husband, Doug, planned their wedding reception for tonight at her parents' house in Mandeville, since so many people couldn't get to the wedding earlier in month. I took my kids along, and Martha from the office went too. But our co-worker, Vita, stayed home, expecting her parents to arrive soon, since they were evacuating from their home on the west bank of the Mississippi.

The party was fun, but much of the conversation focused on the coming storm. Most people had the attitude, "We live far enough away from the coast. We stayed through Andrew; we'll stay through this." Remembering how miserable it was after Andrew - five days without electricity and air-conditioning in south Louisiana in August had tempers flaring and putrid meat rotting in the freezer - I found little comfort in that thought. But I did not plan on leaving either.



Boat rests on roof of Louisiana home after Hurricane Katrina, August 2005

It took us almost three hours to make the 45 minute trip home. We avoided the interstate, knowing it would be jammed and slow-moving; the two-lane state highway we took was not much better. Several times the kids and I talked about how glad we were that we don't live in New Orleans.

(Continued on page 4)

Consent and the Court of Public Opinion

By
Anne Munch, JD and Patti Powers, JD

The surge of media attention surrounding high profile sexual assault cases in the last few years has brought the question of what the crime of sexual assault really means to the forefront of our minds and into our conversations. Attitudes and opinions held by the public have fueled a lively

debate on this topic. These ideas and beliefs held by the public reflect what the court of public opinion believes about this crime. Many of the jurors who ultimately decide these cases in a courtroom spend time debating the issue in the court of public opinion first.

(Continued on page 2)

NSVRC

Inside The Resource

- 3 CSA in Bearing Straits
- 8 Coalition Spotlight
- 11 Focus on Prevention
- 15 SAAM and Poetry Slam
- 15 Relief Fund

Consent and the Court of Public Opinion

(Continued from page 1)

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Much of the debate centers on what consent really means in the context of sexual encounters. Consent is a widely employed, if not implicit, defense in non-stranger sexual assault cases that brings us into direct confrontation with society's fears, myths and misconceptions. It is interesting, albeit disheartening, to watch people grapple with the reality of how consent means something obvious in the course of daily life, but something entirely different in the context of sex. The true depth of the double standard that our culture holds stands startlingly bright in the spotlight of some of these criminal cases.

Consider the definition of consent as defined by sexual assault law in Colorado. (CRS 18-3-403) It reads in pertinent part, "Consent means cooperation in act or attitude pursuant to an exercise of free will and with knowledge of the nature of the act. A current or previous relationship shall not be sufficient to constitute consent. Submission under the influence of fear shall not constitute consent."

This definition is replete with common sense, especially when one considers it in light of our every day experiences. We all know what it means to consent to something; we do it every day. We know what cooperation looks and feels like. Can I borrow your car? Will you loan me \$50? Can you give me a ride to the soccer game? We can all picture what it is like to consent to the above examples. We can also picture what it looks like to

not consent, or to withdraw consent in these examples, and if coerced, threatened or forced into them, we understand the situations as non-consensual.

The challenge arises when we change the backdrop from the every day examples to one of a sexual encounter. It seems that the standard changes. Most sexual assault cases are won or lost in the court of public opinion. And, public opinion suggests that, unlike virtually any other crime in our culture, victims are to blame, in whole or in part, for the crime that happens to them. They either brought it on themselves by unwise conduct that preceded the assault, or they are imperfect and not worthy of the kind of credibility required to hold the rapist accountable. This unique standard draws attention to the conduct, past or likability of the victim, often forgoing any fair analysis, criticism, or judgment of the person charged with committing the crime.

Most sexual assault cases are won or lost in the court of public opinion.

Have you ever heard or witnessed the expression of the sentiments of the court of public opinion? Consider comments made by jurors in criminal cases that resulted in acquittals such as, "she consented as soon as she got drunk with him" and "what did she think would happen when she went up to his room?" How do we respond to this kind of sentiment in a way that might make sense to the person uttering these comments? We ask why someone would say such things about a victim who is adamant that she did not consent to what happened to her?

(Continued on page 14)

NSVRC Council Member Inducted into Hall of Fame

Clema Lewis, NSVRC Advisory Council member was inducted into the Virgin Islands Women's Hall of Fame in November 2005. For her leadership as a co-director of the Women's Coalition of St. Croix, Lewis and fellow co-director Mary Mingus, were among 13 honorees recognized by the Virgin Islands Commission on the Status of Women. According to Sonia Boyce, the Commission's Chairwomen, "it is a way to show appreciation for those who have contributed to the development of the community."



The following article by an Inupiat woman from a very remote region of Alaska offers a rare and important view of Child Sexual Assault (CSA). More than a survivor story, this remarkable piece represents her attempt to understand CSA as a social problem, and her effort to help others. It is especially remarkable because there are virtually no sexual assault services in this region. She approaches the personally painful subject with insight and an obvious need to learn more and to share information; she encourages openness and therapy for others. Throughout, her voice resonates with a simple reality that goes beyond the value of any statistics.

Although Alaska has the highest rate of sexual assault of all states, we have relatively few first-hand accounts of its prevalence or impact; clearly this primary source document is a rare, unique resource.

Child Sexual Abuse in the Bering Straits Region

By
Karlene Sagoonik

I am a survivor of child sexual abuse and much of my life has been plagued with emotional, spiritual, and physical consequences of the abuse, and this is part of my reason for writing on the subject. I live in a small town (population: approx. 240) in the Bering Straits region of Alaska, and I know that there are others that have suffered in many of the same ways that I have. So I decided to write this paper and interview some people of different generations in my area to help me understand how they deal with child sexual assault (CSA).

Unlike most of the people I interviewed for this paper, I have received counseling and have gone through different types of therapy at different intervals in my lifetime. As a result, I am able to talk about my experiences more openly. However, I have problems that may never go away, even though counseling has helped me understand and deal with the issue. In writing this paper, I suffered memories, which made me physically ill, angry, frustrated, very lonely, and my mental and physical self acted as though the assault had just happened, even though it was a long time ago.

In spite of these things, I feel that I need to reach out to people who are weary of keeping their secrets. I need to let them know that this kind of abuse happened to many others and it is okay to go to people who are willing and able to help. It is important for people to recover from CSA and therapy is a very important part of the healing process. I recommend that anyone who is a victim of CSA and who has not received help, get help through some type of counseling.

It is difficult to determine how prevalent child sexual abuse is in the Bering Straits Region because statistics are inadequate and present a different viewpoint than the one you find when talking with actual victims and

others in a community in the Bering Straits. I want to show the reader different viewpoints from statistics; discuss some actual victims of child sexual abuse; and consider what can aid in their restoration.

Reports of how prevalent people think child sexual abuse is in the Bering Straits Region differ. According to a census of the population of the Bering Straits Region, 40% of 9,176 people are between the ages of 0-19 (3,670), and statistics from Kawerak's Child Advocacy Center in Nome say 51 cases of child sexual abuse were reported in the region for the entire year of 2003. That means that approximately one child per 180 (of total population of region) or one in 72 (of youth population in the region) was sexually victimized. But these reported cases are far fewer than the incidents I heard about when I asked people from my region.

(Continued on page 10)



Recollections of a Hurricane

(Continued from page 1)

Sunday, Aug. 28: I awoke to the sound of the phone at just after 7:00 am. It was Misty, who only last night was celebrating her marriage and planning on staying through the storm. And last night we had talked about how we'd have Monday off if the power was out. Now Misty announced, "I know I woke you up. You gotta get up. It's a Category 5 now. You have to get the kids up and you have to leave, so I won't worry about you."

Misty is not one to panic, so I knew if she was leaving, it must be bad. I started getting things ready at my house. Clothes for - what, three days, four days? There's no telling, so I packed about four days of clothes for me and the kids. Then I began looking around the house in a new way. What if the house floods at floor level; what can I reasonably move to a higher location?

What if we have roof damage and water comes in that way? What if windows blow out and wind comes in through them? I took apart the computers and moved them and the peripherals into closets, and then gave up; I worried about getting on the road. My son, Jack, 11, packed his most treasured possessions - his video game systems and games. Watching him, I began to think about our house being broken into, which had happened once before, and I hastily packed my jewelry. My daughter, Melissa, 13, still miffed at being woken up so early was busy holding the couch down, for which she received some nasty looks and finally some less-than-kind words from me.

Misty had mentioned that hotel rooms were available in Jackson, TN, north of Memphis, but we're headed west rather than north, to the home of my stepson Stephen in Lafayette, LA. It's normally a 2-hour trip. Before leaving, we went to LaFASA's office so I could unplug our server and move things off the floor. It was hot and I was anxious to get on the road, so rather than disassemble all the computers, I just unplugged them.

In spite of contraflow - the re-directing of all highway lanes in one direction, away from New Orleans - the interstates were clogged, and our trip took five hours. We finally arrived at Stephen's one-bedroom, one-bath apartment, and settled in on the couch and loveseat. That evening a friend of his came by with his little brother, who played video games with Jack,

and it seemed so normal. I kept an eye out the window, wondering how much of the storm would make it this way, and what the impending doom would mean for LaFASA. I had closed the office before when power was out, and once when our water wasn't working, but never for more than a day or so at a time. It seemed that this will be at least two days, maybe more. Will that be okay? What will it mean? How will I let people know? There were no answers, and all we could do was

wait for the storm to dictate what would happen next.

Monday, Aug. 29: The storm was supposed to have hit last night. Here in Lafayette, we lost power for an hour or so. We can see TV coverage of New Orleans and Biloxi, but the kids and I are more interested in what's happening near our home in Hammond, which is an hour north of New Orleans.

Every hour or so, we tried to call people, on cell phones and land lines, with no luck. My daughter discovered what everyone would soon realize, that when phones fail, text messages still go through. She got a message from a friend who didn't evacuate - a tree just fell on their truck. A few minutes later, a new message - another tree just fell on their house. This did nothing to assuage my concerns about my own house and the LaFASA office.

Tuesday, Aug. 30: Like the rest of the nation, we were glued to the TV watching the ever-worsening situation in New Orleans as water from the breached levees flooded the city. We saw the thousands and thousands of people trapped, without food and water - no power, no a/c, no sanitation. I sat on my son's leather sofa and watched this on his widescreen TV, dreading the news that I knew was coming. "People are being raped there," I told Melissa, and she asked how I knew. I explained the dynamics of rape and how the mix of frustration, powerlessness, anger, alcohol and drugs, and vulnerability will mean that some of those stranded folks would become the victims of other stranded folks. Yes, I knew it in my bones, and I knew that the systems that would normally help them - criminal justice, health care, social services - were in chaos mode, if any mode at all. How can people get help for being victimized when they can't even get drinking water?



Hurricane Katrina toppled cars.

(Continued on next page)

Recollections of a Hurricane

That led me to worry about the helpers, particularly the ones I know and care about. I'm pretty sure the rape crisis and other social service folks would have evacuated, but what about police and health care staff? The state's oldest SANE program is at Charity Hospital, and the news reports of staff there being shot at and giving each other IV fluids to stay hydrated were making me crazy, wondering if the people I know were among them. I was sick.

Wednesday, Aug. 31: Unable to get in touch with anyone in our parish, I decided to just go and see, but I left the kids behind - in case it was bad. On the drive I listened to radio call-in shows from Baton Rouge and Hammond, giving me a better feel than the TV reports of what was going on outside New Orleans: 'A store just got four more generators, but they'll be gone soon.' 'A gas station has gas available, and the line isn't bad, only about an hour long.' and 'We have a fresh water spring at this location if anyone needs water. It was surreal, and it became more so the farther east I drove. Downed trees became more frequent, shredded billboards, and metal roofs peeled off buildings like sardine cans.

I got to Hammond, and it was familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. No power meant no traffic lights, so drivers were courteous. One gas station evidently had gas and a generator for the pumps, and more police cars guarding the place than customers. LaFASA's office was fine; I was so relieved - one down, one to go. I noticed that some neighbors in our office park weren't so lucky, with tree damage to their roofs.

Driving to my house, I saw more bizarre sights. Huge old oak trees bowled over like saplings, their wide but shallow root systems ripped from the ground. Power lines laid across the road; luckily, no standing water. Two children's bikes stuck like kites in trees. Compared to the scenes on TV from New Orleans and Biloxi, it was clear that this was nothing, but it was still very strange to see.

I got to Hammond, and it was familiar and unfamiliar at the same time.



Pickup truck stuck in water after Hurricane Katrina

My house was okay and I felt relieved, although several trees had fallen just a few feet from the front. There were trees on the power lines, and I wasn't sure what that meant or what I could do about it. The house smelled nauseating. I dragged a trash can up to the refrigerator and freezer, quickly emptying everything; but it was a messy job - three days with no power and southern Louisiana heat. It seemed everything, including frozen chicken, had liquefied. I tied up the bags and went to wash my hands, but of course, there was no water.

The good news that my house and office were undamaged was offset by the radio interview I heard with a spokesman from the power company, estimating that we could be without electricity for anywhere from three to eight weeks. Clearly the kids and I needed to go somewhere that we could stay for a while, and the most likely spot was my parents' house in Massachusetts. I felt disloyal leaving the state, but staying would have meant sitting and looking at each other, with no school, no work, no telephone, no internet...nothing to do but wait for life to re-start.

When I got back to Lafayette, the non-stop TV coverage had begun to include sporadic reports of rapes at the Superdome and the Convention Center. "You were right, Mom," Melissa said. Those are words I rarely hear from my kids, but in this case, they brought me no pleasure.

Thursday, Sept. 1: It was time to regroup from gone-for-a-few-days mode to gone-for-who-knows-how-long, but-at-least-a-few-weeks mode. I was acutely aware of how lucky we were to be able to assess our house and to make this transition. Still, many of the normal, daily things we all take for granted were inaccessible. Misty sent me a text-message, "Did we get paid?" Because our bank is based in Gulfport, MS, I didn't know and couldn't find out the answer. My cash was running low, and if we were going to be out of state for several weeks, I needed to get some prescriptions refilled. Between Stephen's apartment, the Lafayette rape crisis center, and an internet café, I was able to work out most of these details.

My children were bored and antsy. Spending all day sleeping, watching TV, and playing video games had gotten old. They wanted to know how we were getting to

(Continued on next page)

Recollections of a Hurricane

(Continued from page 5)

Massachusetts, when they would go back to school, when they could see their friends, and so many other things I had no way of knowing. We all had a bit of cabin fever.

Through the miracle of text messages and emails, I heard from my staff, who were scattered around. Thankfully, everyone was fine, although we later learned that our fiscal manager, Patrick, had lost most of his possessions. I was still worried about law enforcement and medical colleagues/friends in New Orleans, both for those who stayed, and for the homes, jobs, and futures of those who evacuated. Serving on statewide task forces, I've often joked with the people in the New Orleans area about how unaware they are of the realities in the rest of the state. No matter what their fields - rape crisis, forensic exams, crime labs, prosecution, law enforcement - things tend to be one way in New Orleans and another way in the rest of the state. Sometimes it's better and sometimes it's worse, but it's always different. What will happen now? Have we lost all these wonderful programs? Will the Children's Hospital CARE Center, the Charity Hospital SANE Program, the state's oldest Rape Crisis Program be a thing of the past?

I worried about the women, children, and men who I knew in my heart were being sexually assaulted in the midst of the chaos and frustration, in New Orleans and elsewhere. I worried about the staff of the programs in New Orleans, and also about their clients. The New Orleans Rape Crisis Program has always had a large group of survivors who depended on the program for support and community; many tended to have high rates of issues not seen as often elsewhere in the state - ritual abuse histories, dissociative identity disorder. I thought of how the chaos of the past week must have impacted these survivors - the fear about the storm, the rush to pack and evacuate, and now, being stuck, powerless, without clothes and other necessities, wondering if they had homes or jobs anymore, and concerned how they would manage without their support system at the Rape Crisis Program.

On the positive side, the anti-rape community across the country had reached out through cyberspace to offer help in many forms, including places to stay, money, jobs, and womanpower. Some were outraged at the racist overtones of

the storm coverage, and the slightest passing acknowledgement of how the chaos had led to violence against women. I found so much comfort in both the kindness and the outrage of my colleagues, in knowing that some things, indeed, were the same as they have always been.

Sunday, Sept. 4, Labor Day Weekend: Once we finally got to Massachusetts, the kids and I felt at home. The fall weather was beautiful, so unlike Louisiana where it is summer until November or so. The kids could visit their friends and cousins, and finally, having phone lines, cell service, and wireless internet, I could work.

I felt like I should be doing something, but wasn't sure what. My mind was foggy from trying to take in all that had



Fallen tree landed in front of Benitez's house, instead of on top of it.

happened, all the pain and loss, and from trying to adjust to ongoing and uncertain changes. At the very least, I knew that the rape crisis community would need resources, for individual survivors, staff members, and programs. Since our website was down due to my unplugging the server before the storm, I set up a new one, www.louisianaraperelief.org, and a fund to take donations.

Tuesday, Sept. 6: By now, I had more than enough to do: calls from the media, conference calls with the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) and other national groups about setting up a national relief fund and establishing a database to track the number of rapes in the hurricane's aftermath. After all the days of waiting and doing nothing, it felt wonderful to be doing something.

I finally started to hear from some New Orleans friends, and much of the news seems bad. Police friends talk about being shot at, shooting back, and being left in the city with no food, no water, no ammunition, no place to stay, no radio communications, and unable to help people the way they are used to. On top of that, most of them had lost their homes and all their belongings. One police friend said, "there's going to be so many cops who are really messed up'." Some reports of friends were fine, because they had evacuated before the storm hit. Still others knew that because of the location of their homes relative to the breached levees, they had lost everything. And still others anxiously awaited the chance to get back in and see.

(Continued on next page.)

Recollections of a Hurricane

Monday, Sept. 19: The kids and I returned to Louisiana. It turns out that they only missed two days of school. Enough trees had finally been cleared from the rural roads so the buses could get through. At our house we had water, power, cable, and phone service, but dead trees were still leaning on the power lines, which made me nervous, and I needed to get someone to move the trees and branches from my driveway and yard.

Now, things are the same, but they're different. In Hammond, Slidell, Baton Rouge - the places an hour or so from New Orleans - traffic is really bad, which doesn't help people with frayed nerves. Everyone I know has extra people in their house. Monique has herself and her three kids and two dogs, plus three adults, three teenagers and two more dogs. Roxie has four adults, two teenagers, two premature baby boys, a dog and an iguana, in addition to herself, Ralph, and their dog and cat. Even at LaFASA's office, we have colleagues from the Louisiana Supreme Court working with us. They needed a place to work, and we had extra space, so here they are. We know and like these folks, so it's nice, but it's strange, too.

Everyone is sick of hearing about the storm, yet no one can talk about anything else. Water-cooler conversation has gone from sharks in the Gulf and the movie being filmed downtown to how to get that god-awful smell out of the refrigerator and the frustration of trying to communicate with FEMA. Everyone's job seems to have changed completely.

Just as the storm brought out the best and the worst in people, the changes in people are both good and bad. We all have a new, clear appreciation for the things we took for granted - a mold-free home, having a job, family who are alive and well, water coming out of the faucet, an open restaurant, gas at the gas station. At the same time, nerves have been worn raw, and little things that used to roll off are now a big deal. Underlying the day-to-day issues of insurance adjusters

and delays in delivery of replacement furniture are the bigger anxieties about what the state cutbacks will mean for jobs, services, and our collective future, whether the city will really come back, whether we will really be okay.

Saturday, October 1: I returned from Pittsburgh last night. At some point on my return trip it dawned on me that my making these trips, planned before the hurricane, was about fulfilling obligations, yes, and getting back to normal, and being around my kind and nurturing colleagues. But it was also about avoidance. I want to avoid almost everything about being here, except my kids, beginning with the stifling heat. It's technically fall, it's October, but the temperature is in the high 90's. And today I found out that my

ex-husband's aunt - my children's great-aunt - was one of the 34 elderly folks who drowned in a St. Bernard Parish nursing home the Friday after the hurricane and flood.



Houses ravaged by Hurricane Katrina.

It seems that as a community, we are still in shock even weeks later. Sitting at lunch at the locally owned Mexican restaurant, we now stare straight ahead, not speaking, and seeing nothing. If you'd ask us what we are thinking about, we could not tell you. We're not thinking. We're trying to absorb it all, all the loss, all the change, and the enormity of the task at hand. But most of all, we question - how could this have happened?

*Now, things are the same,
but they're different.*

We tell each other that we just want normalcy, but even that is problematic because we know that what was normal is gone forever. Like a sexual assault survivor, what we really want is for this not to have happened. Since that can't happen, what we need to do now is get used to this new life, and come to think of it as normal. We know more changes are coming, and we can't imagine what normal might one day look like. As with sexual assault survivors, life has been forever cleaved into Before ... and After.





Coalition

SATRC Gives Greater Focus to Primary Prevention

By Sandra Malone, Coordinator of Prevention Education

Sexual Assault & Trauma Resource Center (SATRC) of Rhode Island

This is an exciting time for sexual violence prevention educators! For over 20 years the Sexual Assault & Trauma Resource Center (SATRC) has provided prevention education workshops to schools, community groups, parents and administrators. Over the past year, attending conferences that spotlighted primary prevention and our interactions with other educators around this exciting approach, have been extremely inspiring, providing a renewed energy and optimism toward prevention efforts. The work being done in other states, by both male and female colleagues, is extremely motivating and helpful as we develop and implement more effective strategies in prevention.

Since the fall of 2004, the Education Department has assessed and redesigned programs to include a greater focus on primary prevention. As we continue to brainstorm about strategies that could effectively prevent violence from occurring in the first place and about the best way to maximize our outreach, we are also developing a fresh approach to educating the community by addressing root causes of sexual violence, creating awareness of perceived social norms, and promoting healthy environments.

For a number of years, SATRC has measured the success of education programs through pre, post, and

follow-up questionnaires that assess attitude change, as well as learned and retained knowledge. To better understand the root causes of violence and the impact of our programs we've designed a questionnaire to measure and evaluate behavior change. Thus far, data collected from follow-up questionnaires (six months to two years

We investigate motivating factors that lead sex offenders to commit a crime of sexual violence.

after program's completion) is very encouraging and helps us improve our educational approaches, evaluation methods, and program effectiveness.

In our program re-design process we investigate motivating factors that lead sex offenders to commit a crime of sexual violence. And who better to learn from than the perpetrators

We designed a questionnaire specifically for convicted sex offenders.

themselves, especially concerning patterns and behaviors. We designed a questionnaire specifically for convicted sex offenders. We worked in collaboration with Peter Loss, the director of the Sex Offender Treatment Program (SOTP) at the Adult Corrections Institute of Rhode Island. Mr. Loss agreed that the information we were looking for would be fascinating and asked for five sex offenders to act

as consultants to our project. The offenders provided expertise on the content and semantics of the questionnaire. We hoped to discover characteristics and behaviors of sex offenders that can be identified before sexual violence is perpetrated and thereby re-design our programs to address these factors.

The questionnaires have been returned and the information is currently being assessed. We are pleased with the preliminary findings and feel that the information will ultimately shape much of our primary prevention efforts. Specifically, local statistics and data collected on questions such as "what type of child does a sex offender avoid" and "why some attempted assaults were unsuccessful" are invaluable tools to help parents prevent and/or reduce child victimization.

Thus far, the information gathered directly from local sex offenders has been extremely well received at workshops for parents. Workshop evaluations and comments overwhelmingly indicate that the sex offender data was the most helpful information presented.

We have a long way to go to eradicate sexual violence, but are encouraged that addressing its root causes is a positive, long overdue approach that will ultimately prove to be very effective in our prevention efforts.

Spotlight



Women Writer's Symposium to Women's Coalition

Our On-going Journey

By Mary Mingus

Women's Coalition of St. Croix Inc.

When I dare to be powerful - to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.

- Audre Lorde

Audre attended the Women Writer's Symposium in 1981 at the University of the Virgin Islands. Along with 20 participants, a feminist, anti-racist, grassroots movement began which led to the formation of The Women's Coalition of St. Croix. What was pivotal about this event was the unanimous recognition of the problem of domestic violence directed against women in the US Virgin Islands.

With a mission to provide services to reduce and prevent all forms of family violence and assist victims, The Women's Coalition evolved into a non-profit, tax exempt, multi-cultural organization dedicated to ending violence against women and children; promoting the freedom from oppression of sexism and racism, and giving aid and support to victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.

Under the leadership of co-directors, the organization has grown to include a crisis center, 24 hour 365 days a year advocate program, shelter, Children's Center, and the upcoming opening of a thrift shop. Staffed by 17 employees and under the guidance of a Board of Directors, The Women's Coalition has a dual function of serving domestic violence and sexual assault victims.

Our client profile mirrors that of our multi-cultural population. Women of every culture, age, color, nationality, and educational socio-economic level are cared for by our staff. As a result of the territory's diversity, commitment to cultural sensitivity and anti-racism are a high priority.

In response to the ever-changing needs in our community, new and comprehensive services are continually developed. The Women's Coalition of St. Croix was instrumental in the formation of the Virgin Islands Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Council, in 1986, which provides educational training and workshops to schools on a variety of related topics. In 1988 the organization spearheaded the creation of The Men's Coalition - a batterers' treatment program.

2006 marks the 25th anniversary of The Women's Coalition.

Our presence is as critical today as it was in 1981.

2006 marks the 25th anniversary of The Women's Coalition. Our presence is as critical today as it was in 1981. Local statistics indicate that 37 women in the US Virgin Islands have died as a

result of domestic violence since 1984; over 500 women file restraining orders against men a year on St. Croix, and our client load has increased from 81 in 1981 to 13,167 in 2004.

More information about The Women's Coalition can be found at: www.wcstx.com.



Clema Lewis (left) with co-director Mary Mingus

Today Clema Lewis & Mary Mingus serve as co-directors.

Mary is a founding member and first executive director of The Women's Coalition. A native of New York, she spent her first 10 years on the Island teaching at a local elementary school.

Attracted by the Anti-racism Workshop, Clema began working with the coalition in 1982 as a counselor. In 1991 she was appointed co-director.

The hierarchical structure was changed in 1991 to joint leadership to reflect multi-cultural management and shared authority.



Child Sexual Abuse in the Bering Straits Region

(Continued from page 3)

Two researchers, Burgess and Holmstrom, tell us what signs to look for in a victim of sexual abuse and what should be done to aid the healing process.* They say that the healing process depends on how sexual abuse is approached and defined in our immediate environments and communities. So I looked to my environment and communities here in the Bering Straits Region.

As I interviewed people from my area and I found that attitudes towards CSA have changed over time. ** It seemed that people in different age groups hold different ideas about CSA. To show how these attitudes have changed, I interviewed people from different generations. I talked with some people who were at least thirty or over in a small town and a neighboring village in the Bering Straits Region. Nearly all the women and one in three of the men I interviewed had been sexually abused before they reached adolescence.

A man, in his thirties, said to me, "My cousin and I were little kids and we started playing this game of 'let me see your thing, and I'll show you mine.'" He said it turned into having sex with each other. He said he was too little to know how to do it, but his cousin no older than him knew how and he felt it was CSA. He also said that all his buddies were sexually abused and that one of them committed suicide.

A woman I have known my entire life has told me more than once that she was sexually abused by her brothers, cousins, and an uncle. She has not gotten any kind of help. Instead she just keeps doing drugs and drinking. To this day, I don't think her parents know about the abuse.

I also know of another older woman from the same family who used to babysit people's kids. She was sexually abused by one of her brothers. Years later, she beat him up when they were both in a drunken stupor, and there are stories that she sexually abused some young men when they were adolescent boys. People who are abused sometimes wind up being abusers themselves. I know that she has never gotten any kind of help either. She just keeps drinking and doing drugs.

As I talked with more and more people, I became more and more aware that the statistics of sexual abuse of children do not reflect all the occurrences. According to three different people in their forties they either knew of someone who was sexually abused who did not report it or receive any kind of

help, or they were victims of sexual abuse themselves. One woman from a neighboring town said she knows her cousin was sexually abused as a child, and she has grown into a bitter, miserable person who seems to have no sort of relief in sight from the experience. This woman said, "[CSA] affects people all their life and talking with a friend or a professional would help."

Someone in her forties told me some time ago that she was sexually abused over and over during her adolescent years, but she never tried to get any kind of help. Instead, she has taken to drinking alcohol for years. Another woman in her forties was also abused when she was a child and now she abuses crack cocaine, alcohol and other drugs. Someone once said she traded one of her daughters for sex so she could get a piece of crack cocaine. Her daughters are doing drugs, drinking, and each one has had at least one baby before she turned 18. It was her sister who told me that she had confided in her. Some of these instances were hearsay or confidential conversations, but they do indicate how many people there have had some sort of damaging sexual experience before they reached adulthood.

As I interviewed the older generations, the subject of CSA was either unknown or they had been forbidden to speak of it back when they were young. I asked a man in his fifties if sexual abuse was a problem when he was a kid. He said he did not know if there were problems with sexual abuse, but that he did not start hearing about sexual abuse until he was in his twenties. A woman in the same age group said either there was no problem or that it was never talked about. When I asked her to clarify herself, she said there could have been a problem in the community, but she did not know because it was never talked about.

As I talked with more and more people, I became more and more aware that the statistics of sexual abuse of children do not reflect all the occurrences.

The silence on the subject of CSA may be a result of cultural admonition on the older generations not to discuss sexual abuse. When talking with

a sixty year old woman, she said she was molested when she was 12 years old and tried to tell her aunt, but her aunt told her, "Don't talk like that." After that, she said it was years before she told anyone, because she got the idea that people did not talk about stuff like that.

(Continued on page 12)

Focus on Prevention

The Violence Prevention Resource Collaborative

In January 2005, a group of organizations concerned with violence prevention met in Enola, PA to consider how their coming together in a national network could have a positive impact on their respective work and common goals. This group of five organizations funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), calls itself The Violence Prevention Resource Collaborative.

A general goal of this partnership is to support CDC grantees and a larger audience of individuals, communities, agencies and organizations through technical assistance, training, and resource coordination and dissemination. The underlying motivation is to develop a community of practice that serves to share and enhance technical assistance capacity of each organization while informing and supporting the group.



NSVRC - National Sexual Violence Resource Center

www.nsvrc.org

NYVPRC - National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center

www.safeyouth.org

PREVENT - Preventing Violence through Education, Networking & Technical Assistance

www.prevent.unc.edu

Prevention Connection: A Violence Against Women Prevention Partnership

www.PreventConnect.org

VAWnet - National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women

www.VAWnet.org



Child Sexual Abuse in the Bering Straits Region

(Continued from page 10)

Some time ago, I spoke with a woman who is now in her seventies, and the closest she came to admitting that she was a victim of sexual abuse was that she said to me, she knew how I felt. According to her, people used to get drunk a long time ago and things happened that they could not talk about. It would appear that a lot of things people could not talk about were associated to abuse.

Reported or not, child sexual abuse is a problem that needs to be addressed and dealt with in a positive way. One of the first steps in a community is just to get more information about CSA and to treat it as a severe injury, with symptoms and consequences, and methods of treatment, and not as a subject for shame.

Burgess and Holmstrom point out some signs to look for in child sexual abuse victims, and they describe two phases: the acute (immediate) phase and the reorganizational phase. *

Acute Phase

"The acute phase [can] last from a few days to several weeks. [It's when a] victim's life has been ... disrupted, and going through disorientation and shock".* Victims go through physical and emotional symptoms common to someone who has experienced a terrible tragedy. Physical reactions may include muscle soreness and bruises, feeling tired and problems with sleeping, eating too much or not enough, and feeling jumpy. As a CSA victim, I have gone through most of the physical reactions and many of the emotional reactions as well.

Emotional reactions in this phase can be of two different kinds, expressed and controlled. The expressed reactions are visible and include laughing or crying, making jokes or becoming stiff or shaking. The controlled reactions are invisible to others. The victim appears not to feel anything but is actually depressed, angry, feeling shameful, or having thoughts of revenge. I remember feeling disgust, shame, or guilt while appearing calm. Other victims have mentioned masking feelings too: two of the women I spoke with, the one who was abused by her brothers and uncle, and the forty something woman who

said she was abused repeatedly as an adolescent mentioned that they felt this way. Victims may also alternate between expressed and controlled responses, and these responses may surprise or catch the victim off guard. Emotions may go from one extreme to another.

Reorganizational Phase

In the reorganizational phase, the victim comes to terms with the sexual abuse experience. This phase can last from "a couple of months to years." * How long this phase lasts depends on how old the person is, their character, and the kind of help the person receives.

During this phase, the victim makes adjustments in his or her life, moves to a new location or changes their phone number, makes new friends, changes schools or jobs, fears being alone, or fears things associated with the place

or circumstances of the sexual assault. After that, victims reorganize and prioritize their lives, making choices, which Burgess and Holmstrom say is healthy. According to them, "sexual assault is the ultimate loss of personal control." Knowing that a CSA problem exists and what victim suffers from are two steps toward acquiring help for the CSA victim.

Knowing how the healing process for victims of CSA begins is also helpful towards restoration. I interviewed a child sexual abuse counselor and she said, "There are different kinds of therapy." They include, play therapy, art therapy, narrative therapy and group therapy.

The Bering Straits region does not lend itself to group therapy because a few of the Village Based Counselors (VBC) (these are counselors usually associated with clinics

in a given village) have not had enough training yet to get one started. In the Nome area, no clinicians are available to get one started because they are travelling around the region and area and are short-staffed. One thing I brought up with the

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(Continued on next page)

Child Sexual Abuse in the Bering Straits Region

counselor was the fact that, in our village, the VBC tried to get different groups started, but the circle of trust was broken. The circle of trust is the most important part of group therapy, and they are afraid to have it happen to them. There is just way too much gossip in the village.

Another kind of therapy involves the parents and a moderator in the counseling of the CSA victim. The kind of therapy used depends on how long the abuse has been going on and what is best suited to the child's needs. Therapy can take anywhere from six weeks to six months, but the child can carry the trauma throughout their lives. What a clinician does through therapy is to teach the victims coping skills to help them deal with suicidal thoughts and depression because self-esteem is always an issue. I am so glad to have been taught to think positively through therapy, reading, and talking to people who used to be negative thinkers. All of these things make a big difference.

The clinician from Norton Sound Health Corporation says there are workbooks that specifically target sexual abuse. These workbooks include topics on anger management, coping skills, self-esteem, anxiety issues, and identifying feelings. They teach CSA victims to get in touch with their feelings and they discuss how their bodies respond to CSA. Victims have a tendency to dissociate themselves from their bodies to what is happening around them. When the sexual abuse has happened frequently, this dissociation is a common reaction.

Therapy for dreams and nightmares treat a victim's tendency to hold secrets and not communicate with people, and there is also therapy for kids who have to go to court that helps them prepare to face the perpetrator of the CSA. A child may or may not get the help she or he needs and sometimes, whether a child gets help or not depends on how child sexual abuse is viewed by the community.

My interviews suggested to me that how the community sees CSA depends on the viewpoint of different generations in the community. For example, someone in their thirties might be more willing to talk about sexual issues or CSA than an elderly person. People in their forties were told not to talk about such things. The lack of communication about CSA seems to have lead to destructive circle after destructive circle.

According to the thirty-something people, CSA was something that happened to them and they were able to tell someone about it, but they could never see themselves asking

for therapy because there is so much shame and fear of being judged and gossiped about. They talked about the abuse, but it was mostly buddies telling secrets to buddies.

According to the people in their forties, CSA was something they absolutely could not mention when they were young. If they said they were sexually abused or molested, they were blamed by family and community members. It was their fault. For them, CSA was something they told someone about many years later. They never got any help at all, and the wounds of the sexual abuse and all the problems associated with it have just festered. These are the people who have spent much of their lives abusing drugs or alcohol because they were not allowed to talk about the pain they suffered.

People in their fifties either had no idea CSA occurred, or it was forbidden to ever mention child sexual abuse. The same goes for the people in their sixties and seventies.

Many of these people are unable to get help because of the shame, blame, guilt, and misconceptions that surround getting help for a problem that is so much more widespread than people are willing to admit.

It is very hard to admit to someone that you have been sexually abused, but it is the best thing a person can do for one's self. Anyone who has been victimized by CSA should get help through some type of counseling because it is important for the healing process. Norman Vincent Peale once said, "The secret of life isn't what happens to you but what you do with what happens to you."



Notes:

* Ann Wobert Burgess D.N.SC. and Lynda Lytle Holmstrom, PhD. "Rape Trauma Syndrome" *American Journal of Psychiatry* 131:9, September 1974.

** Confidential interviews of various residents in the Bearing Straits region conducted by Karlene Sagoonick, March and April 2004.

Consent and the Court of Public Opinion

(Continued from page 2)

Perhaps it is because of what is at stake to the members of the court of public opinion. It is a risk to look beyond judging the victim to judging the actions of the rapist. Who wants to believe that this crime happens in the extremely high numbers that it does, that people who we know, like and date or marry are capable of such a horrible act? It is easier to blame what happened on a misunderstanding, alcohol, or victim conduct.

How do we articulate a response to the powerful force of public opinion? Perhaps a starting place is in naming the faulty logic and double standard when we hear it. The double standard jumps out when we consider how victims of other crimes are treated. Does a business owner consent to theft by allowing people to browse in the store? What if the shop owner displays flashy and desirable items for sale in the window? Is he not asking for the theft by advertising his goods? Does a drunk on the street who is passed out from alcohol consent to having his wallet stolen, after all, he should have known what would happen to him? Does a person consent to kidnapping if they accept a ride from someone they believe they can trust who ends up holding them against their will? Does a person consent to theft if they agree to give a friend \$50, but the "friend" takes \$100 instead? Does a home owner consent to burglary because they left their door unlocked when they left for work that day?

To not only meet the consent defense, but in a more imperative sense, to take control of it, we must investigate and express the victim's sexual assault with these questions in mind: Why was the victim's voice silenced? Why didn't she say no? Why couldn't she say no? Why wasn't no good enough? We must come to know the victim's singular reality before, during and subsequent to the sexual assault. Sensory and attendant emotional detail provides a dynamic link with juror's own experience and tools for assessing credibility. We must also come to know the offender as the victim initially knew him as well as the stranger he became during the sexual assault. We must be aware of the offender's high potential for other

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related acts of violence which will provide a truer look at the context of this crime. Evidence of patterns or plans which otherwise appear situational can be seen more realistically as premeditated and predatory. Stalking is very frequently a component of offender planning.

When we as prosecutors take our case to the jury in courtrooms across our country, based upon our broadened investigation and focus on the singular reality of rape experienced by a victim, we communicate beyond our courtrooms in what has become the court of

public opinion and in the context of the life experience of members of our society. Consent or agreement is something we should be free to do or not do, as we choose. We should be free to change our minds. What we do is up to us. When we bring home to the jury the reality of the crime of rape committed by an offender who knew the victim, we will eloquently emphasize the deeper reality that the victim didn't know him. He was a stranger. Why was the victim's voice silenced? We have answered that question--because of the person who she was changed when her life was removed from her control. We ask for accountability as does she. Our work is to give the jury in the courtroom and in the vast court of society, the truth, the reality of rape beyond stereotypes: the stereotypes of consenting victims and the stereotypes used by offenders to mask their identities.

Applying common sense to rape cases is the key to bringing justice to both victims and offenders. Victims of rape, who find the courage to go through our criminal justice system deserve our thanks and support for their willingness to endure the painful process. As we improve our ability to listen to the victims' voices, hold their offenders accountable, and bring fairness and common sense to the court of public opinion, we will evolve as a culture, and justice will make its home in the reality of truth rather than myth.



Anne Munch and Patti Powers are prosecutors with specialized knowledge and experience in the area of sexual assault. Both are nationally recognized experts and enjoy speaking and training prosecutors and other audiences on topics related to sexual assault. You can contact them at annemunch@comcast.net or patti.powers@co.yakima.wa.us

SAAM 2006 It About Time to Prevent Sexual Violence

Based on feedback from advocates and other partners in the field of sexual violence prevention, the NSVRC's 2006 SAAM Campaign introduces a new campaign slogan: ***It's About Time to Prevent Sexual Violence.*** With this new campaign, the NSVRC places increased emphasis on sexual violence prevention. Additionally, this year's tag line is ***Speak Out,*** reminding us of the power of our voice.

In January, our annual SAAM packets were sent out to rape crisis centers, coalitions and allied organizations. The packet includes ideas for planning events for April to promote awareness, and specific actions that focus on prevention of sexual violence; as always it provides information on SAAM products.

This year, we particularly encourage nationwide involvement in awareness activities on Thursday, **April 6, 2006** as ***"A Day to End Sexual Violence."*** Of course, we hope that awareness activities will occur throughout the month of April.

Since April is also widely recognized as National Poetry Month, the NSVRC encourages programs to organize or participate in a SAAM Poetry Slam event in their community. Poetry Slams are events in which poets perform their work in front of an audience, with a dual emphasis on writing and performance. Increasingly popular

since the 1980s, poetry slams are an excellent way to raise awareness of an issue and get community involvement. For a *How-to Guide* on organizing a Poetry Slam or to find SAAM Poetry Slams registered in your area please visit www.nsvrc.org/saam.

Don't forget to post your SAAM activities to the NSVRC calendar on our website (www.nsvrc.org/saam),

and we would love to see copies of pictures taken during your events. Also, please complete your feedback forms by May 31, 2006. If you have questions or need additional information, contact Eboni Braxton, toll free at (877) 739-3895, ext. 119, or email ebraxton@nsvrc.org.



Relief Fund for Sexual Assault Victims



The *Relief Fund for Sexual Assault Victims* has been jointly established by the following anti-sexual violence organizations to assist sexual assault victims and advocacy programs affected by Hurricane Katrina.

National Sexual Assault Coalition
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Working Together To End Sexual Violence

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INCEST
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NSVRC
NATIONAL SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESOURCE CENTER
A PROJECT OF PENNSYLVANIA COALITION AGAINST RAPE

Donate Now!

Join the effort to give support and services to sexual assault victims.
Make a donation to the *Relief Fund for Sexual Assault Victims*.

- Donations will be accepted online via credit card or through Pay Pal
- Or you may mail a check or money order to:

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c/o National Sexual Violence Resource Center
123 North Enola Drive
Enola, PA 17025

- One hundred percent of donations will go to affected communities.

www.reliefundforsexualassaultvictims.org

It's About Time TO Prevent Sexual Violence Speak Out

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This newsletter is available in large print, text only format on our website: www.nsvrc.org

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NATIONAL SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESOURCE CENTER

A Project of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape

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