

CHILDHOOD ABUSE I SURVIVED, SO CAN YOU!

By James



I was born in a beautiful little town in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The first nine years of my life were wonderful. However, in beginning in 1967, my childhood was abruptly changed forever.

Often, when I would go to play at my best friend's house, his older brother would be home hiding in the shadows waiting for his opportunity to abuse me. I remember being there and hearing a door locking, knowing I was in trouble. I would get this sinking feeling in my gut, dreading what was in store for me. My friend would hold me down while his brother attacked me.

At the time, I did not know if my friend's brother held power over him too, forcing him to cooperate, or whether my friend willingly participated. All I knew was that it was wrong, and it made me feel sick. Afterwards, I would run home to shower, desperate to wash off this filthy feeling of utter guilt and shame.

Experiencing this abuse from him for nearly three years — and wondering why my friend did not come to my defense and stop the abuse — made an impact on me and my mental health. Decades later, I think back, wondering how I could possibly have considered this boy to be my best friend.

Sexual abuse is a kind of trauma that carries intense feelings of shame and fear. I remember that I just wanted to hide.

My mental health deteriorated; the shame was eating me away inside. I felt obligated to keep this secret — to hide this terrible knowledge from

everyone around me. The ever-present shame convinced me that I deserved to suffer from the hurt I felt.

Looking back, I now know that it wasn't even my shame to carry. What happened wasn't my fault. But reaching this conclusion came from a long recovery process. My healing took time.

Needless to say, I never brought charges against my friend's brother. At one point I tried to find him in order to confront him but found it too painful to continue on that journey. I never told my parents nor my children. It took me over 50 years to disclose that I had been sexually abused as a child due to the mis-founded shame and guilt I carried. By the time I did, I was just about non-functional and it was obvious that I needed proper medication and professional counseling. It was hard, and it hurt, but it's what I needed to do — get it out in the open. It affected me so much emotionally. As time went by this trauma kept getting worse. In order to get better I needed to seek help. My local doctor referred me to what is now my mental health team at the UK's National Health Service (NHS). My problem had been building up for so many years. Once I was diagnosed with Complex PTSD (CPTSD) and was taking the proper medication and had one-on-one appointments with my assigned psychologist I was able to open up and tell my experience of being abused as a child.

Finally talking about it forced me to face and deal with the long-term effects of the mental trauma caused by being abused as a child. Time and help from the right people brought healing. I am no longer at the mercy of this mental trauma and am now able to identify what happened and understand that none of this was of my own doing. I can see how I carried this trauma into adulthood, and I can identify with others who have been through similar experiences.

Trauma needs to be dealt with, and we must prioritize our mental health for healing to begin. If you have been through childhood abuse of any kind, please, please, please seek help. If I can go through that long, dark tunnel and reach the other side, so can you. It can make all the difference in your life. It did mine!

My deepest desire for anyone on their healing journey — remember, you are worth it!