

Hello

If you are reading this then you have done the bravest thing in your life. Reporting someone who has abused/molested or raped you takes a lot of courage. I am very proud of you.

Let me tell you a bit about myself. I was born in 1972, I have a brother and two parents. From the age of 3 to 16 I was abused, and molested by my father, and although it's not proved my mother was aware. My abuse was not violent and I grew up thinking this was very normal. Not all abuse is like that but this is my experience. After leaving home at 16, I eventually married and had 3 children. At various points in my life, I suffered from depression and several suicide attempts. In 2016 I decided to report my father for what he had done. This letter is my experience and insight into what this process may be like.

Feb 2016

Today is the day I'm going to report him, I'm going to tell the police what he did, I'm not sure what to expect. There have been so many cases in the press, what will they think...will they believe me? I'm not sure what to expect but today is the day I take control. I decide to visit one of the many support centres dedicated to victims of abuse (referred to as a SARC – Sexual Assault Referral Centre). I was made to feel very welcome and I was put at ease straight away. The worker explained she would contact the police and an initial statement would be taken. I'm very nervous but I know I'm doing the right thing. The interview was not like what I thought, the officer who took my statement was down to earth, made me laugh at some points. His questions were factual but he gave me loads of time to answer. I was unsure what words to use for body parts and how much detail I had to give but the officer was professional and asked relevant questions. This process took about 2 hours for me but it will vary from person to person. I had a support worker sit in with me which I found helpful because afterward, I had loads of questions. I was told an officer who specialised in investigating my type of crime would be allocated my case and someone would be in touch within the next few weeks. I was proud of what I had just done but also emotional. I would advise on the day you do this to arrange to have someone at home to support you and allow yourself time to process what you have done. Making a statement brings back memories and you can feel upset or angry. These are normal but remember you are doing the right thing and you have support every step of the way.

March 2016

An officer has contacted me. She will be investigating and looking after my case from start to finish. Sometimes the police refer to the investigating officer as the OIC (officer in charge). She explains the process and what's going to happen next. I'm a bit scared and wonder if I've made the right decision, but I know there is no going back. The abuse is not my fault, it is a serious crime and he deserves to be punished. It's explained I will be having a video interview. This can be done at one of the many support centres available for victims. They are nice and to be honest just look like an ordinary living room in someone's house. I'm not given a timescale for when this happens. This type of crime takes a long time to investigate so patience is needed.

April 2016

I have arrived to give my video statement, I didn't sleep last night, so worried about what to expect...what I should wear..what if I cry..Or don't cry...what if I forget something. Please don't worry I can tell you these feelings are normal and the officer in charge will explain everything to you. My officer showed me the room, where the cameras were, and took me to meet the person overlooking the video interview. This person will take notes of the interview; remind the interviewing officer if they forget to ask a question as well as operating the interview equipment. I was put at ease and had a coffee and a chat before the interview started. Now I'm not going to lie, giving a statement is hard and very emotional. This might be the first time you have told anyone what you have experienced and suffered. You will be reliving memories you have hidden away and tried to bury. It's ok to be upset, it's ok to be scared, but what you are doing is courageous but most of all it's the right thing to do. The officer will ask the relevant questions and check your understanding all the way through. If you aren't sure of anything or don't understand a question make sure you tell the officer – it is ok, they want you to tell them. Again make sure you have support when you get home and sometimes it's a good idea to let your doctor know what you are going through. Professionals are there to support you in every way.

After completing the interview I'm told that the investigation will now take place. The officers in charge of your case will need to go through every bit of your statement, collate facts and information in preparation for an arrest. This can take weeks or months.

July 2016.

My father has been arrested, interviewed, and released on bail. I'm scared - what if he tries to contact me. I'm reassured that he has been given strict instructions (bail conditions) not to do this and could be remanded into police/prison custody if he was to try and contact me. The police keep me up-to-date with what has happened and briefly what he has said. You may find that you won't be told anything about the interview. . The next few months I'm told will be about collecting evidence. This can take a very long time and at points can feel a little frustrating. Try not to put your life on hold, hard I know when it's in your mind 24/7. Ask your officer to send you a little update each month, even if there's nothing to report and inquiries are ongoing it's peace of mind and reassurance that your case is not sat on a shelf. The police adhere to the 'Victims Code' and there are strict guidelines of when officers should keep victims updated, you can ask the OIC for a copy of the code.

Officers involved in historic child abuse are also dealing with 'live cases' which I'm sure you understand comes first. Make plans as normal. Have things to look forward to like a weekend away or events with your family or friends. Having something to focus on other than your case will also help. It may be that the time has come to share with family or friends what has happened or going through. You cannot do this alone and having support now and in the future will make a difference...trust me to have someone in a place you can talk over your concerns worries and fears.

Once the investigation is complete the police will complete an 'Advice File' which is sent to the CPS (Crown Prosecution Service). When CPS receives the advice file it is allocated to a specialist sexual offenses lawyer to review the file and make a charging decision. Only the CPS can decide if a

perpetrator is charged, sometimes they request the police make further inquiries before they make a decision.

Feb 2017

It's been a year since I first reported my abuse but today I got the news that my father has answered bail and has been charged with 9 offences. I'm emotional, scared, and not sure what to expect but I also know he will finally face the consequences for what he has done. Court proceedings move very slowly and I can expect a trial date in around 6 months. When your perpetrator is charged they will attend a first hearing at the Magistrate Court, this is so he or she can plead guilty/or not guilty. It is only brief and you do not need to attend.

April 2017

My father appears in Magistrates court and his case is adjourned for 4 weeks it can be sent to the crown court where a judge will preside over his case. I have lots of questions and worry why it's taking so long but most crimes of this nature cannot be heard in a magistrate's court. All crimes initially get sent to Magistrates court, this is our legal system and again patience is needed. Even if the perpetrator pleads guilty at the Magistrates court, it's more than likely they will be sentenced at the Crown Court. The police and/or Witness Care should keep you updated about all court dates – regardless of whether you need to attend or not.

May 2017

My father pleads not guilty. A trial is set for Nov 2017...this is the point reality will hit you. It's scary I know, but how fantastic and this is what all your bravery and hard work doing the statement has resulted in.

Be prepared for experiencing a range of emotions, you may want to talk about it all the time...keep everything to yourself...cry...not sleep well...go over the abuse in your mind...doubt you have it in you to go through with it. These feelings are normal and will pass. Remember you are brilliant, fantastic. You can do this!

As the trial date draws near the police will also ask you about making a victim personal statement (VPS) – this is a chance for you to explain to the judge the impact the abuse has had on your life. Sometimes the police also refer to this as a Victim Impact Statement – whichever term is used it means the same thing and the officer in charge will explain all the facts and give you information to read at home.

October 2017

The week before the trial I'm so very nervous, can't sleep, and can't eat. I visit my doctor who prescribes sleeping tablets for a few days. Witness care has been in touch to confirm everything. I've

asked for a screen, my reason was that I didn't want my father to see me. The police can request 'Special Measures' so you can give evidence to the best of your ability; Special Measures can be things such as giving in evidence in court behind a screen or being allowed to give evidence in a different courtroom – the police will talk you through all the available options and discuss the best one/s for you. Remember this is a very personal choice – there is no right or wrong - it's about making the right decision for you.

I've been invited for a visit to court to see what the room looks like and what to expect. Take someone with you, this can feel very overwhelming and you may not remember all the questions that have been going around your head the last few weeks. Write them down and don't be afraid to ask. The witness support volunteers are fantastic and experience your concerns and worries every day. They are not there to know details about your case but to support you in the lead-up and during the trial.

The night before the trial.

Witness care has rung; my case has been postponed due to lack of court space. I'm heartbroken and frustrated, I did not expect this. Sometimes trials will overrun into a new week so planned trials have to be postponed. I am not told when a new date will be. This is hard to deal with as I've been building up to this moment for a year and a half. Police remind me this will happen and I'm doing brilliantly.

The trial is set for 3 weeks.

December 2017

My case has been adjourned till June 2017. I just feel like giving up but I can't I've come this far. Sometimes cases are adjourned due to reasons beyond anyone's control, new evidence, lack of evidence, witnesses, and court staff being ill. This happens in rare cases but be prepared that not every trial happens on the 1st date.

June 2018

It's nearly been 2 and half years but today my trial started, I've got loads of support but found messages and calling several people with the same updates tiring. Maybe have a group chat you can add everyone to send 1 update or maybe have a friend or family member do this for you.

Be prepared for lots of waiting around, take some snacks and drinks and books or a hobby. Every minute will seem like hours and trying to distract yourself will help.

Now I'd like to say that giving evidence in court is going to be ok...this is the hardest thing you will ever do, it will bring every emotion possible up. But...you are amazing..You have come this far and you can do this. You have the full support of the police, friends, and family and once your evidence is over the hard bit is done. Be so proud of yourself.

At some point during the trial, you may be asked if you would like to read a victim impact statement. This is a statement from you that outlines, not what abuse you have suffered, but how the abuse has

affected you during your life. The statement is personal and maybe the only chance for your perpetrator to hear what you have always wanted to say. The choice is up to you and you can read it in court if you like or your barrister can read it on your behalf.

I chose to read my impact statement on the day of sentencing. It is a very different emotional feeling to giving evidence. For me, it was a final release to be able to say what I've always felt inside.

Give yourself time to decide if you would like to do this and time to write how you are feeling. There is no rush.

After 6 days my father was charged and sentenced. I'm 1 of the lucky ones, not every case gets to court, and not every case is going to be found guilty. I wish I could wave a magic wand and tell you what the outcome will be but I will say this.

YOU DID NOT DESERVE THE ABUSE YOU HAVE SUFFERED. THE MONTHS OR YEARS OF BLAMING YOURSELF, THE TEARS YOU HAVE CRIED THE ANGUISH YOU HAVE GONE THROUGH. YOU ARE A VICTIM AND YOUR PERPETRATOR DESERVES TO BE PUNISHED. YOU WILL GET THROUGH THIS AND REGARDLESS OF THE OUTCOME YOU ARE BRAVE AND COURAGEOUS AND YOUR DECISION TO REPORT THEM HAS GIVEN YOU BACK CONTROL. YOU ARE AMAZING AND THIS WILL NOT DEFINE YOUR LIFE.

I WISH YOU THE BEST OF LUCK IN YOUR JOURNEY

Love Me