



Little Warriors



Reaching out after solitary 'journey'

Childhood sex abuse survivor sets up charity to help others

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SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

Glori Meldrum can now sleep through the night. The 35-year-old successful businesswoman and mother of two (with an adopted baby on the way from Africa) says she has been haunted by memories of sexual abuse at the hands of a member of her extended family for the past 25 years.

"At eight years of age, I lost absolutely everything I knew. This was somebody I trusted, that worked with kids in the school system and hunted me."

At that time, Meldrum — who insists she is not a victim but survivor — and her recently divorced mom and sister had moved in with relatives to save money.

The abuse continued for close to two years with her abuser controlling her by warning if she ever told anyone, he would kill her mother and sister.

"Truly I was a strange little child after that happened. There's a picture of me before the abuse and one after and it's totally a different kid."

Meldrum says when she did speak up and sought help through social services, no one believed her and her extended family disowned her.

"So, my whole childhood was staying with a family that didn't care about me.... That was the second horrific part — the revictimization.

"I made a choice in my early teens that I was going to live or die. I was suicidal at this point because it was just so much ... to understand why someone would ever do those things.

"I'll never forget it. I was at my dad's house and I was sitting there with a razor saying, 'I'm either in or I'm out.' I've got to either fight for myself or I'm done. I truly couldn't take any more."

Meldrum continued living with her mom and sister but didn't tell her dad about the abuse until she was eighteen.

"I never told him — too embarrassing — because it's your dad, right?"

A turning point for Meldrum came a few years ago after she started looking for a not-for-profit group advocating for the rights of sexually abused children.

When she didn't find what she was looking for, she created it.

"When I decided to start Little Warriors a friend said, 'You know what, you can't be a hypocrite. If you're going to go and



PHOTO BY DUNCAN KINNEY

Glori Meldrum speaks at the public launch of the Little Warriors last week. In the foreground is one of the foundation's collectible Be Brave dolls, available to donors as a fundraiser for the charity.

tell these kids they've got to be brave, you've got to be, too!"

So, on Sept. 15, 2004, Meldrum drove to the Sherwood Park RCMP and told her story again.

To her relief, once the police began investigating, multiple other girls — now women and also relatives — stepped forward. "I felt like I had someone that had walked that path I had," she says with a sad smile.

Despite the loss of her file and her abuser claiming insanity, he was finally charged a year later.

"People need to know that sexual abuse isn't about tapping a kid on the bum. It's about fondling and molestation and rape — it's about horrible things."

Meldrum testified for a grueling two hours during the "pre-trial" — with her relatives and abuser sitting on "his" side of the courtroom.

"It's humiliating, even in court, even though I know I didn't do anything wrong ... to sit there and describe in front of the person: 'What you did to me.'"

Meldrum wouldn't even allow her devoted husband and "best friend" hear her testimony, saying, "I didn't want that in my house."

Months later, while awaiting a trial date, Meldrum received a call from the RCMP. She says she could hear the officer choking up while telling her the case was dismissed because of a Supreme Court ruling.

Because her mother had taken her to a hypnotist when she was 14 for "proof" the abuse had happened, she was deemed a "tainted" witness.

"It's hard not to be allowed that final stage.

"This wasn't a matter of, he stole my bike — he stole my childhood. I mean I basically raised myself since I was eight years old and that was tough."

But it's also why children have a voice through the organization she has created.

Meldrum lugs around big binders filled with up-to-date research about the prevalence of child sexual abuse and says the shocking numbers are conservative.

Statistics show 60 per cent of all sexual abuse is against children and 95 per cent of child sexual abuse victims know the perpetrator.

The most common age for abuse in boys is four and for girls, 13.

"Young prostitutes, the majority of them were victims of sexual abuse — drugs, alcohol, gambling eating disorders, anxiety depression — no wonder.

"Kids should have to worry about being kids and not (about) being hunted down and sexually abused."

Last Wednesday, with the symbol of a warrior watching from over her shoulder, a sometimes tearful Meldrum saw her dream of justice take flight.

At the official media launch inside the cozy Little Warriors office on 124 Street — with board members and her closest supporters ranging from CEOs of major corporations to local media looking on — the launch of the first non-profit of its kind in Canada began.

She describes the immense task of organizing, fundraising and accumulating supporters "a journey."

Meldrum has raised about \$200,000 so far, but hopes and prays for the "angel" who will help with the \$750,000 needed to expand the program nationwide.

"I know this is lofty and I've been told I'm a little crazy sometimes but ... it's about our community finally standing up for the vulnerable people in society, our children."

For more information visit www.little-warriors.ca.

Next week, in Part 2 of this series, learn about the Stewards of Children Program — designed to help adults recognize signs of sexual abuse in children.