



# Pandora's Aquarium

www.PandorasAquarium.org

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## A New Year and a New Era - Letter from the President

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*By: Shannon*

This February marked the fifteenth anniversary of when I was raped at age 15. This is a new era for me - as of last month, I have spent the majority of my life as a rape survivor. Fifteen years ago, I couldn't have spoken the words out loud. Now, I am willing to tell a friend or a television audience. I thought my life was over; it turns out that it hadn't yet begun.

As this new year commences, I am proud to lead an organization that helps thousands of rape and sexual survivors realize that their lives are far from over. In 2008, nearly 5,000 people registered new accounts at the Pandora's Aquarium message board, and thousands more found support through a quarter of a million new posts. We

launched the Sexual Assault Lending Library to ensure that all survivors have access to resources. And to provide the framework to improve and expand our programs even more, Pandora's Aquarium received 501(c)(3) status from the IRS.

In 2009, we hope to reach even more people in need of support. At this time, we rely solely on donations from individuals to cover all operating expenses. We especially thank those of you who donated in 2008. Whether you gave \$5 or \$100, your donation truly made a difference.

Now that the 15th anniversary of my rape has passed, I am thankful for this new era - I am glad that resources exist now that weren't available when I was assaulted, and

that a survivor only needs a computer and internet connection to find a community of compassionate and caring individuals who simply understand. Though we cannot end rape and sexual abuse today, we can help all survivors find the tools they need to heal. Each volunteer and member is an important part of that goal, and together we can truly make a difference.

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.  
- Margaret Mead*

### New Programs

*By: Jes*

In the eight years I've been involved with Pandora's Aquarium as a member and moderator, it has grown from a small message board and chat room into an innovative non-profit organization staffed by a team of 50

volunteers, dedicated to offering members a variety of services. Pandora's Aquarium has developed an extensive array of programs for survivors of sexual violence and their loved ones. Within the past year, guest speakers have been introduced, an

internet-based lending library has been launched and this October, Pandora's Aquarium is sponsoring its first ever healing retreat.

**Guest Speakers**

At least quarterly, the chat room hosts guest speakers

who provide information and field questions about their areas of expertise. These popular chats are geared toward sexual violence recovery, and speakers have included healing inspirations, authors, and activists.

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## New Programs *continued from Page 1*

Recent speakers were Wendy Maltz, MSW, a therapist and author of *The Sexual Healing Journey: A Guide for Survivors of Sexual Abuse* and Patti Levin, PsyD, an expert on trauma therapy and EMDR.

### **Library**

Healing from sexual violence can be aided by books and DVDs, which can sometimes be hard to obtain. To meet the need for resources, Pandora's Aquarium holds over 100 donated books about sexual violence in a lending library. Volunteers will ship two books free of charge to members with over 100 posts. To learn more about the library or peruse available titles, please visit [www.sexualassaultlibrary.com](http://www.sexualassaultlibrary.com).

### **Retreats**

Pandora's Aquarium has scheduled its first sexual violence recovery retreat weekend for October, 2009. The retreat, *Moving Forward: Surviving to Thriving through Connection with*

*Ourselves and Others* is open to women survivors of rape, sexual assault, or sexual abuse who are 18 years of age or older.

Scheduled for October, 2009 at the St. Joseph's Institute in Port Matilda, Pennsylvania, the weekend promises to be healing for 35 attendees who will benefit from group support and workshops including group work, challenging exercises, stress relief, and self-defense training. Registration for the retreat is now open. To find out more, please visit [www.pandys.org/retreat](http://www.pandys.org/retreat).

Our volunteer staff of 50 has been hard at work creating and implementing these new offerings and others, but we always want your input. If you have an idea about how to improve these programs or have a new one to suggest, please contact a board moderator or email us all at [admin@pandys.org](mailto:admin@pandys.org). We'd love to hear from you!

## Book Review: Finding Angela Shelton

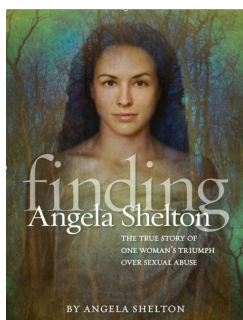
By: Kristy

Finding Angela Shelton is a memoir worth reading, both for its inspiration and humor. It chronicles the making of Angela's documentary, "Searching For Angela Shelton," in which she drives across America meeting other women who share the name Angela Shelton.

Through interviewing these women about the experiences that have shaped their lives, she discovers that 70% have been victims of sexual assault or domestic violence. This shocking realization prompts Angela to revisit her own history, finding meaning in the stories that other women share along the way.

As with her documentary, readers follow Angela on her journey of discovery. There are many incredible moments shared with others who share her name, and we see a very human Angela who is brave enough to share her innermost feelings.

Angela's connection with an anonymous Angela who struggles with alcoholism is particularly moving, and demonstrates that



## Carrots

-Contributed by Catt

Take a carrot for an example.  
When you grate it, it's still a carrot.  
You can cook it, grate it, chop it, boil it, mash it. You can do what you want to it, but it never STOPS being a carrot and nothing in the world could stop it from being one. Yes, it's been changed, yes it's a different now, and yes it was tasty before it was changed.  
But then again, it's still tasty after it was changed, no matter what you've done to it. Hell, you can even make carrot cake, and that is pretty damn tasty!  
NOTHING in the world can change who you are unless you let it.  
Hard times and strife... sometimes it just shows you who you really are, how versatile you are. If you had never cooked that carrot, you wouldn't know that it could taste like that, you'd think it would just have that one taste, but it doesn't. Strife, hard times, it shows us who we really are, it doesn't change you, all it does is show another side of you, that you may not have seen before.  
We just need to see that.

*Grate me, Chop me, Peel me, Boil me or make me into a carrot cake, I am still going to be me, and NOTHING will ever change that.*

we all have something to give, even when we don't believe it.

Throughout the book we are provided with flashback glimpses of Angela's own childhood abuse. Towards the end of the trip, Angela confronts the father who abused her. It is a powerful scene that highlights not only Angela's vulnerabilities, but also her strengths. She writes with courage, warmth and raw honesty—the end result is a poignant, often heartbreaking, and at times funny memoir that sends a powerful message that no survivor is alone.

Angela demonstrates the power one person has to make a difference, bringing a message of encouragement and hope for all. A must read!

## Member's Corner

### Stolen future- Reclaimed

Dreams a plenty filled her head  
Things to do and become  
Ways to grow and have fun

All that changed in an instant  
The day he started his torment  
Slowly the confidence within  
dwindles

Loses her way,  
Which path shall i go  
Hides the pain deep inside

No clarity now,  
Stumbles along through life,  
Twists and turns

Until she finds her calling again  
That future that was stolen  
Must be sought out again

Find the purpose of being here  
Beyond the object of their desire  
I am here to make a difference

Only a part of my future stolen  
As i have reclaimed back the rest  
Torment still attacks my mind

Strength keeps my resolve going  
To overcome the gremlins of the past  
Walk forward with head held high

Once again feel the sun on my face  
Wind in my hair  
Grateful for each day i can touch  
another's heart

By Tania



"Fantasy" vs reality—Painting by Anath

## If you were my brother or sister...

Contributed By: Pavrita

If I were your sister... I would hold you and cry with you as long as you needed, any time. I would let you know that I love you. I would tell you I'm sorry you hurt, I'm sorry something so precious and sacred was stolen from you. I would tell you please don't blame yourself, you're not the one who's evil, your abuser/attacker is. I would tell you, no matter how long it's been, no matter what happened, no matter how your abuser is related to you...

... if someone is telling you to get over it, to forgive and forget... if they minimize what was done or compare it to someone else's pain and say at least yours wasn't as bad, you should be grateful... if they try to guilt you with "but they're family/your friend/your teacher/your pastor/your whatever, you should let it go, you should reconcile"...if someone blames you, says what happened was normal and you're blowing it out of proportion, or refuses to believe you... if they accuse you of being a bad person because you won't forgive, because you have PTSD,

because you dare to be angry at the person who violated you... don't listen to them. Only you know how deep those wounds go and only you can determine how long it will take to heal from them, or if you can forgive... even if the answer is that it's indefinite or that you can't. We don't know what the future holds, we only know what we can do for today.

I would tell you that your worth is not based on what this person did to you, even if it seems like it. Nor is it based on whether you are handling this the way you are "supposed" to. We must all walk this journey on the path that has the surest footing for each of us.

Most of all, I would tell you that you WILL see the other side of this someday, that maybe we don't know what that will look like, but you will get there, and I will be with you every step of the way."

*"Only you know how deep those wounds go and only you can determine how long it will take to heal from them"*

### Recipe: Fudge Brownies

1 cup butter  
4 ounces unsweetened chocolate  
4 eggs  
1 pinch salt  
2 cups sugar  
1 cup flour, sifted  
1 tsp baking powder  
1 tsp vanilla  
1 cup chopped pecans (optional)

Preheat oven to 325°F. grease a 13x9 baking pan. Melt butter and chocolate in small saucepan over low heat. Stir and blend, set aside to cool. Beat eggs until light yellow; add salt, sugar, flour, and baking powder. Beat well. Blend into cooled chocolate, vanilla and pecans. Blend thoroughly. Pour into prepared pan and bake for 35-45 minutes or until knife inserted in center comes out clean. Cool before cutting.

Contributed by: marmarcat86

## Staff Corner: Interview with Katy

**By: Stephanie**

*\*Katy has since become a board moderator*

### **Firstly can you tell us a bit about yourself?**

I am a survivor of prolonged sexual abuse between the ages of 7 and 27 – and also acquaintance rape as a young adult. I have tried hard not to let my abusive experiences define who I am, but undoubtedly these experiences are a part of my life which I cannot and should not deny.

In my life, I work hard and I play hard! I have worked for the past ten years as an RN in the NICU where I have had the opportunity to care for many special babies and families. When I am not at work, I spend much of my spare time with my girlfriend of five years, and my two pampered pooches - my chihuahua who is somewhat of a diva, and my westie who is the more refined of the two! My passion is photography and travel, and as anyone who knows me will tell you, my suitcase is always packed awaiting the next adventure!

### **How did you find Pandora's Aquarium and how do you feel the board has contributed to your healing?**

Before coming to Pandora's Aquarium, I had searched many times for online help and support – and it was only when I stumbled upon Pandys in September 2006 that I truly felt I had found something very special. Since then, Pandys has become an

integral part of my daily life – because the innate sense of value, acceptance and understanding that the community promotes, has helped me to get through some very tough times. I think most importantly, Pandys gave me a voice when I felt I didn't have one – and learning to use that voice has enabled me to go back to therapy, to ask for help and support from my loved ones, and to get some control back in my life.

### **Can you tell us about what your role as chatterator involves?**

I assumed the role of "Chatterator" in January 2008. I lead a fantastic group of chat mods, and collectively we strive to ensure that the chat room is kept safe and secure for all who want to use it. There are many survivor chat rooms online, but I believe that the dedication shown by the chat mod team contributes to making our chat room one of the most supportive. In addition to this, I help to ensure that we have several moderated topic chats every month where members can discuss certain aspects of their healing in a more detailed and structured manner. As Chatterator, I would always encourage members to contact me if they had a concern, comment or query about the chat room.

The experience of being chatterator has had its ups

and downs, but I do not regret accepting this position for a second and feel very honoured to be able to give something back to a community that has helped me so much.

### **If there were no limitations what dream addition would you make to the board?**

I believe there are really exciting changes and additions to Pandys going on at the moment and, as Pandys is growing, I would love every survivor, wherever they are in the world, to know about the Pandys community and have the chance to be a part of it! Obviously, as with anything, there are limitations to what this community can provide for its members. If I was to have a magic wand, I would love to have a chat room that could be moderated 24/7! I also love the concept that Pandora's Aquarium survivor camps could become a reality for all members.

### **What are your personal hopes for the future?**

I hope that my life continues to ascend in the same positive way that it has for the past few years. I spent the vast majority of my early life feeling afraid, ashamed, and alone – and now, in my mid thirties, I have suddenly felt that I have a life worth living. I hope to be happy – and it's as simple and as complicated as that!

*Obviously, as with anything, there are limitations to what this community can provide for its members. If I was to have a magic wand, I would love to have a chat room that could be moderated 24/7!*

## Take 5: Questions and Answers with Haullie Free

By: Shannon

### 1) You've done a lot of work for survivors, beginning with Voices of Strength. Can you tell us more about your new project, Survivor Radio Cafe?

I'm glad you asked! This is an online radio show hosted by author Ginger Gillenwater and myself. This show is geared toward survivors of any trauma. This could include sexual abuse, domestic violence, self-injury, mental illness, cancer, chronic illness and so on. We host some fantastic shows, interviewing authors, poets, musicians, pioneers in the survivor community and anyone who is making an effort to empower the lives of others. The radio show airs every Sunday at 7:00PM PST and we've had so many inspirational guests and topics thus far. Guests like Lynn Tolson, Angela Shelton, Rosalie Malter, Liza Lee & Lawrence Doochin. We've also had some "edutainable" topics on the show; such as self-injury, borderline personality disorder, Child & teen trafficking, male survivors, a live festival show and survivor meditation. Every show will keep the listener coming back to educate and heal themselves one gifted person at a time. We believe hope needs a voice. The Survivor Radio Cafe is a piece of that world-wide voice that is growing every day.

### 2) What made you decide to become active in raising awareness about sexual abuse?

It all started when I was about 16 years old. I read a traumatic book that made me see that what was going on in my own life was not "normal" at all. The book was called 'A Child Called It' By: David Pelzer. It was the tragic yet inspirational story of a young boy who suffered his first 13 years of life through some of the worst childhood abuse and neglect imaginable by the hands of his Mother. After reading the book; returning it to the library felt wrong, I felt connected to this boy. I felt in some way my eyes were finally opened and that I did not have to feel responsible for the bruises and abuse I had suffered from as a child growing up in many violent homes, from a family that knew nothing but how to beat their children in order to gain superior authority and control. In an instant I felt separated from

this proverbial womb of violence and I had broken out...slowly. Yet for so many years still I had to keep myself silent and so I coded many of my feelings in lyrics and poetry. I also listened to a lot of Tori Amos, I cried silently or alone in those teen years, only when it was time to go to bed and the lights were out; and so the story goes. Yet I found inspiration in those little things like music, lyrics, and in living dreams which thankfully but awkwardly was encouraged out of me by my abusers.

In 1999 I saw a 20/20 documentary that featured Tori Amos, Shannon from Pandys and Kellie Greene from SOAR. It inspired me to visit the web site, 'Welcome To Barbados'. For the first time I felt propelled and inspired to do something for survivors. Even if it was simply by telling my story and showing others that they are not alone. But what was I searching for? Deep down I was looking for answers, I wanted to know if I was truly alone.

### 3) What tips do you have for other survivors who want to take action to raise awareness?

- Definitely check out Stewards for Children if you are a parent or guardian. I believe this program for parents and children's preventative measures education and awareness is just the key for making our future a better, more safer one for children. The program is set up by Darkness to Light ([darkness2light.org](http://darkness2light.org)).

- Communicate to congress and help pass or change laws. Oftentimes all it takes is a mass letter writing campaign. Pay attention when the news calls for action and do your part to do whatever it takes for this cause.

- Create a website or blog; it's the biggest thing since reality TV! Except a whole lot more functional. There are a plethora of wonderful web hosts out there, learn how to design easy web sites or set up a blog to help raise awareness.



- Create an E-Magazine or newsletter; the only way to stay connected is to get the word out.

- Visit outdoor functions for survivors. Although there is a huge amount of information on the internet today as well as a lot of opportunity to speak out. It is very healthy to get out and broaden your horizons. You can: visit a retreat for survivors, host a RAINN party event to help raise money for their nation-wide hotline or your favorite charity, visit survivor art galleries, host documentary viewing parties, book sharing parties, visit high schools and crisis centers and speak out....or listen! The world is your oyster, you can shine!

### 4) Who or what has been your biggest inspiration?

I would have to say at this point in time it would have to be Planet Earth from the distance of the moon staring back. It's quite beautiful and majestic and yet still full of a history that is scarred with pain and agony. Yet there is so much beauty I can't even conceive of it's beauty, it's too big. I have had many inspirations, singers, friends, my husband, animals in their natural state of being...etc. However I think when I look back at an image of our Earth I wonder sometimes what she's contemplating. Does she feel safe yet?

### 5) If you could tell survivors one thing, what would it be?

Challenge yourself! Give yourself many chances, as many as it takes to do whatever it takes for your healing. Never let anyone tell you that they know you better than you know yourself. You can heal the wounds from within. You may always remember, and sometimes it won't always be easy, but it can get better. That I can sincerely promise. You have a purpose; keep dreaming and keep emerging into the light.

Haullie Free is 29 years old and lives in Sunny California, Planet Earth. Learn more about her at [www.voicesofstrength.org](http://www.voicesofstrength.org). To tune in at Survivor Radio Cafe, find out more info here:

[voicesofstrength.org/survivorradiocafe](http://voicesofstrength.org/survivorradiocafe) OR [www.blogtalkradio.com/survivorradiocafe](http://www.blogtalkradio.com/survivorradiocafe).

*"We believe hope needs a voice. The Survivor Radio Cafe is a piece of that world-wide voice..."*

## Reaching Out for Support

**By: Jackie and Jes**

Support is very important to the healing process. Some survivors are lucky enough to receive tremendous support after an assault, while others receive little or no support. Others may find that the strong support they initially receive wanes as the healing process becomes longer. In one thread on our message board, we posed a question about support to our members: *What is good support? What did you and do you need from people? What did you need them to know? What do you need them to know? What can people do to truly be helpful?*

One thing that I wish people knew was that the process is not something that is over and done with in a night or a week. Sometimes I feel like people watch SVU and think that the whole shebang is seriously done in a week. My court process took THREE long YEARS. The interviews, phone calls, depositions and all that was involved were emotionally draining and really kept my anxiety alive. Yet people seemed surprised that "it's still an issue." I wish people knew that you need support sporadically as the process ebbs and flows.

- A survivor

I also wish people knew that PTSD is not something that simply disappears and sometimes things happen (like court, triggers) that can set it off or exacerbate it. I manage

mine really well and no longer need support around it, but there were times when it would have been super nice if people understood more about it.

- A survivor

Unfortunately, it can be hard to find support for a variety of reasons.

- *Sometimes you know you want to reach out, but it is hard to say that you were assaulted and you need help to heal from it.*
- *Many people have a difficult time understanding sexual assault and the issues surrounding it.*
- *Some people may feel embarrassed or ill-equipped to talk about it.*
- *Many are quick to blame victims of sexual violence as a way of feeling safer themselves, saying "Oh, well I wouldn't have done x, y, or z so it won't happen to me."*

To heal from sexual violence, supporters not only need to understand issues that present themselves to survivors, they also need to be able to support the survivor for the duration of the healing process, which can be quite lengthy. When you are reaching out, it can help if you tell the person exactly what you need. If you find yourself struggling to communicate your need for support, consider providing your secondary supporter with the following passage or writing your own.

### Healing Exercise: Drawing Journal

Sometimes there are experiences and feelings that we have that simply defy words. This is where other mediums come in to save the day (so to speak!)

*Materials needed:*

Unlined Journal or 7 sheets of unlined paper  
crayons or colored pencils or pastels  
blending tool (optional)

For one week, take five minutes each day to make an entry into your drawing journal. Time yourself to ensure that you spend no more and no less than 5 minutes on this.

For the five minutes that you are working let color flow out onto the paper, however it wants to, to capture your thoughts/feelings/experiences. It is not about drawing a perfect picture, rather it is about sensing what color/s you are drawn to and how it wants to come out on paper. Let go and allow yourself to really sense this. Simply allow your hands to flow with the color. Some of you may have a picture, some may have scribbles, some may have blended designs.

At the end of the week review your seven drawings. They will tell a story about you, about your week, about where you are.

*Reflect:*

1. What the experience was like for you?
2. What story did your drawing journal tell?
3. What did you discover from doing the exercise?

*\*More healing exercises are available in Pandy's 'reclaiming our lives' forum.*

### For Secondary Supporters:

I survived something terrible and to heal from it, I need your support. What I needed right after my assault might not be what I need now or two years down the road. Despite the way it is depicted on television and in books, healing is a lifelong process and doesn't always come with a tidy resolution.

Healing is a process and often a very long one. During this process I will experience a wide range of emotions and struggles and despite a desperate need for it, I may not know how to ask for support. In fact, I may push away the very people that I need the most. Don't let me! I may get angry and project that at people I love, but I don't mean it. I just don't know what to do with it. I may even seem fine or even tell you I am fine. Please care enough to find out if I really am.

Sometimes I blame myself and worry that others will do the same and that prevents me from reaching out. Remind us that it wasn't my fault and that nothing I could have done would ever justify someone hurting me.

Learn about my healing. That will help you support me because you'll know that PTSD is real and it can prevent me from sleeping or eating. It can mean I'll cry because I heard a name, smelled cologne or saw someone who reminded me of what happened. Understand that what happened was life changing and will be with me on some level for me entire life. It'll help me feel like I'm not crazy and alone.

Most of all, remember that it's still me. Don't be afraid to talk to me or hug me if I ask for it. Feel sorry that I've been hurt, but don't pity me. What happened was horrible but it doesn't have to change who I are. It doesn't have to change my relationship with you. I want more than anything to feel "normal" again. You can help me. I can do this alone but it would be a whole lot easier with you.