

# Pandora's Project

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## A Decade of Healing By Ash

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This year I passed a significant milestone in my healing journey. As I look back over the past 10 years, I'm amazed at how much I have changed and grown from the person I was. After I was raped, I felt that I had lost so much and that the rape had fundamentally changed who I was as a person. Now, I'm able to see that I have indeed fundamentally changed as a person, but that the things I've learned from this horrible experience have made me a better person.

I've learned that pain is pain, and that everyone is worthy of support and compassion. I've learned that as survivors of sexual violence we may share a lot of similarities, but everyone's healing journey is unique and that we have to respect the choices that each survivor makes. I've learned that when you think it's too much and you can't go on, you somehow manage to find your way through. I've learned that healing is a process—and a long one—but that it does get easier, that you can reclaim your life and that it can be better than you'd ever imagined.

One area where I've noticed growth is in my ability to talk about sexual violence and to challenge my thoughts and feelings on related issues. I no longer feel like sexual violence is a sensitive topic that I

should avoid whenever possible. I'm now able to look at the topic objectively, to have difficult discussions and to develop my thoughts on notions like social justice, forgiveness and compassion. Those are conversations I never could have imagined having before, and sometimes I even manage to surprise myself when I share my thoughts.

This year, I decided to take time on my anniversary to reflect on how far I've come and to thank those who stood by me and who played important roles in my healing. Now that the pain isn't as fresh, it's easier for me to look back and see how the support I have had over the years changed the course of my healing journey. I look at my relationship with my husband and see how difficult it was for both of us, how much we fought and struggled to know what to do. But now what I see is an incredible relationship that we both fought really hard for, and I see how it forced us to learn how to communicate better and have a much stronger relationship. Those are the kinds of things I can be grateful for now as I look back.

(Continued on p. 3)



## Coping With Pregnancy as a Survivor By Kristy

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Pregnancy is a life-changing experience that brings with it a rollercoaster of emotions for most expectant parents. Even women who have not experienced sexual abuse can struggle with the changes their bodies (and minds!) go through when pregnant. So when you throw 'survivor issues' into the mix of hormones and the unknown, it stands to reason that many women who have survived child sexual abuse or rape find pregnancy and childbirth challenging.

It's different for every individual, but I found that during my pregnancy I was most afraid of being vulnerable and not being in control of my own body. I didn't trust that my body was capable of growing and nurturing my baby. Throughout my pregnancy I also found that feelings from my past resurfaced and I was triggered by the changes in my body. My baby bump became an invitation for strangers to attempt to touch me without permission. All of a sudden, people thought they had a right to comment on how I looked, and everywhere I went I was offered unsolicited and often conflicting advice.

Not being in control can be anxiety provoking for many pregnant women, not just those who have experienced trauma. Unfortunately there are many things in pregnancy that you just can't control and that can leave some survivors feeling powerless. To help combat these feelings, it is important to take control over the things you do have a say in. It might help to enlist a support person who can accompany you to any appointments, and who can advocate for your wishes or needs when you feel you cannot. Make a list of things that are important to you and any questions or concerns that you have. Ask for any procedures to be fully explained so that you know what to expect and what your options are. Have a plan ready for how you might ground yourself if you do feel anxious or experience flashbacks. Remember that you are the one in control, and that you have a right to speak up about your needs.

Throughout my pregnancy I was afraid that no one would listen to what I wanted during labour and that it would bring back the feelings I had when I was being sexually assaulted. Many women find that developing a birth plan helps them to develop confidence in their ability to manage the upcoming birth. Exploring options with a neutral person, such as a counsellor or a doula, can help you to feel prepared and provide you with a greater sense of control. Although your 'best case scenario' might not eventuate, it still means that you're approaching your labour with a clear idea of what you want and you can make informed decisions.

Many survivors find that pregnancy and parenting are turning points in their healing. It can be empowering to challenge some of the old thought patterns you may still carry from past trauma. You may find that you begin to relate to your body in a new way. After all that your body has been through, it is still able to nurture a developing baby. Your pregnancy can 'give you back' your body as you learn to appreciate what it is capable of.

For more information on coping with pregnancy and parenting, the following articles are featured on our website:

I Will Survive (Thoughts on Survivors Giving Birth)

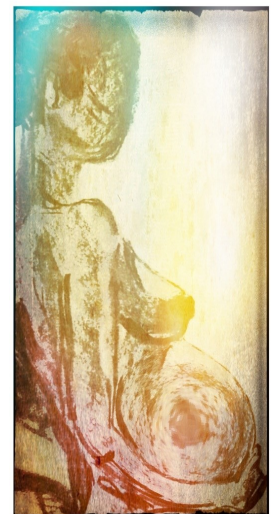
<http://www.pandorasproject.org/articles/survivorgivingbirth.html>

Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Parenting as a Rape or Sexual Abuse Survivor

<http://www.pandorasproject.org/articles/childbirthafterrape.html>

Breast-Feeding as a Rape or Sexual Abuse Survivor

<http://www.pandorasproject.org/articles/breastfeeding.html>



## Q&A: End Revenge Porn

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[End Revenge Porn](#) is a campaign organized by the [Cyber Civil Rights Initiative](#) to provide support and advocacy for victims of revenge porn, or people whose intimate photographs and/or videos have been disseminated on the Internet without their consent.

### What is revenge porn?

Revenge porn is a form of sexual assault that involves the distribution of nude/sexually explicit photos and/or videos of an individual without their consent. Revenge porn, sometimes called cyber-rape or non-consensual pornography, is usually posted by a scorned ex-lover or friend, in order to seek revenge after a relationship has gone sour.

### What laws currently exist to protect victims? What changes do you hope to see to existing legislation?

Victims can bring civil suits, such as privacy or copyright infringement claims. However, civil suits are costly, time-consuming, and offer limited relief. Criminal laws provide the most effective and appropriate protection to victims. The threat of jail time is likely the only way to prevent this conduct from occurring in the first place, and is appropriate considering its devastating impact. Only two states so far have laws in place that treat non-consensual pornography as a crime in itself, New Jersey and California, and California's law is very limited. We would like every state to adopt clear, comprehensive

federal criminal law prohibiting this conduct. Such a law will not only make it possible to protect victims anywhere in the U.S, but will also make it much easier to prosecute the owners of websites that traffic in this material.

### Do you have any international partners working towards similar goals in other countries?

We work with Scottish Women's Aid, which has started a campaign, Stop Revenge Porn, in the UK. Though this is currently our only international partner, we hear from victims all over the world and will seek partnerships as our organization and support network continues to grow.

### Do you deal with victims of sexual assault of which photos or videos were shared online?

### What resources would you recommend to these victims?

Yes! We get an average of ten emails each day to our support email from different victims or victims friends asking for some type of help or advice. Most of our responses advise victims to go to [www.dmcadefender.com](http://www.dmcadefender.com) which is a takedown service that can help remove their pictures from the internet. (Continued p 4.)

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## A Decade of Healing By Ash (cont. p1)

I've recently become interested in reading memoirs by people from all walks of life who have overcome all kinds of different obstacles and have chosen to share their story. It's opened my eyes to the notion that there are many different kinds of pain in the world and that we all have something to learn by seeing how people choose to deal with that pain. I'm able to take my own experiences and the experiences of others to shape how I approach my life and how I choose to

to view what has happened to me and remain positive.

What always stands out to be the most is the idea that everyone has their own story and journey that we have to respect and the idea that we are stronger than we could have ever imagined possible.

## Q&A With Revenge Porn (Continued from p3)

### What can I do if I'm the victim of revenge porn?

If you are a victim of revenge porn you can put in a request to have your pictures taken down via DMCA defender or you can reach out to the website that they are on and explain that the pictures are your property and were not authorized to be posted on other websites. You can also go to your local police station to see if they can help you and investigate. If they are not helpful, I would highly recommend hiring an attorney and seeing if they can do anything to help you.

### If I am a victim of revenge porn, how do I talk to my family and friends about what is going on?

Talking to your friends and family is never an easy thing about such a serious topic. Our advice is for you to always remember that you are not alone and this isn't your fault.

### What can I do to help put an end to revenge porn?

Sign our petition! If you are looking to take on a more active role, visit our site. Our interactive map shows which states have laws, which have proposed laws, and states where without laws. Contact legislators in your state with our legislative proposal and help us end revenge porn in all 50 states. Every law announced is the result of victims and supporters urging lawmakers to address this issue.

## Pets and Healing By Jennifer

Videos of cats on the internet aside, many people bond with animals differently than they do with other humans. When interacting with an animal you're connected to, like petting a dog or riding a horse, your body releases a chemical known as oxytocin, often called a "bonding hormone." This gives you a sense of calm and trust, and nurse Rebecca Johnson of the [Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction](#) believes that oxytocin helps our bodies become ready for healing. Animals are used during therapy, and to facilitate therapy.

Think about how strong that bond would be if it was with an animal that you know well and love? If you have a pet, there's a good chance that you've experienced times when your pet knew what you needed. If you're having a bad day, does your cat come over and bump your arm with his head? If you're crying, have you had your dog come to you and try to nuzzle you? Pets listen to us, without judgment and without interrupting. They become confidantes who will never tell anyone the things we're not ready to share with other people. They can sense our pain, and they want us to feel better.



When I have a particularly difficult time, knowing my dog is depending on me for her needs will drag me out of bed when I just don't want to face the

day. This leads me to a positive cycle of self-care so I can provide her with the care she deserves. Without a doubt, she knows when I have days like this. Our connection is strong enough that I'm not the only one who can tell: if I'm cranky or depressed or sick, my dog doesn't leave my side even for a minute. I've been told her temperament changes based on my mood. For my healing process, my dog has been instrumental.

Jennifer's dog, nicknamed "Moo" loves car rides, the Boston Red Sox, and barking at small dogs. She has taken many cross-country trips, and she loves those as well.

## Coaching Boys Into Men By Jennifer

[Coaching Boys Into Men](#) is a series of resources provided by [Futures Without Violence](#) designed for coaches, teachers, parents, and anyone who works with young men and wants to educate on prevention of violence-- particularly relationship violence. A media campaign in 2000 that encouraged men to teach boys that strength and violence aren't the same thing gave birth to the Coaching Boys Into Men Playbook in the year 2004 with the assistance of the National High School Athletic Coaches Association. This was expanded in 2008 by Futures Without Violence into a program we have today.

Many young children play team sports, and the field or court is a place many of us have learned valuable lessons. Good coaches care about the children they work with, and are respected by kids and parents. A program like CBIM is a great way to educate young boys about respect for themselves and others, to talk about boundaries, and to normalize discussions of violence, which keeps this topic from staying taboo.

### Why Is This Necessary?

According to [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org), nearly 1.5 million high school students in the United States are victims of dating violence each year. One in three American adolescents suffers abuse from a dating partner, whether it be physical, emotional, sexual, or verbal. Seventy percent of college students say that they have been coerced sexually.

## The Survivor Mural Project Returns!

We are excited to announce the return of the [Survivor Mural Project!](#) This exciting project was started several years ago by long-time Board of Director Kristy T. After taking a break to begin her family, Kristy is now re-launching her project. We encourage you to click on the link and visit her Facebook page if you are interested in submitting a piece. Please keep in mind, you DO NOT have to be an artist! One of the wonderful things about art therapy is that we are able to express ourselves how WE need to. Best of luck to Kristy on this wonderful endeavor!

### Talking About It

There are so many reasons people don't talk about abuse. Fear of the abuser, fear of not being believed. Fear about losing a support system, or somehow suffering other consequences. Talking is taboo for many people. CBIM changes this, by talking about things like what abuse is and how to report it, and discussions like this make it easier to talk about in a crisis situation. This means whether a young person witnesses violence, suspects violence, or has violence done against them.

### Community Impact

The program encourages coaches to reach out to parents, schools, colleagues and local advocates. Having a discussion is great, but having a larger discussion is even better!

The [Coaches Kit](#) includes a playbook, a card series on respect, an overview of the program, as well as other resources. The program was designed to be worked into a coaching setting, and gives tips on how to incorporate lessons into practices and your coaching strategy.

To learn more about the program, click here:

[www.coachescorner.com](http://www.coachescorner.com)

Other resources discussed:

[www.futureswithoutviolence.org](http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org), [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)