

Cheyenne and me: The true story of children lost

Wednesday, August 22, 2012 - A Heart Without Compromise; Advocating for Children by Jerome Elam

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Jerome Elam



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SAN ANTONIO, August 22, 2012 – For many of us, the life that we lead falls short of our dreams for

things that could be, but for many the dream of holding a loved one just one more time trumps all others.

According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, in the United States 800,000 children are reported missing each year, an average of 2000 per day.

Included in this number are 58,000 children taken by non-family members whose intent is sexual exploitation and vandalizing the innocence of a child.

As a survivor of child sex abuse and child pornography, I understand the hell these victims endure and the lifetime of pain forced upon them. I have seen the smiling faces of children lost in the world as their loved ones battle heartbreak in their relentless search for them.

As a fourteen year old, I had my own experience with abduction and the evil that lurks in the shadows of this world.

My home life as a child was filled with alcoholism, physical abuse, death threats, a suicide attempt and the loss of my innocence to child sex abuse. I constantly attempted to flee this environment. I was classified, as a “runaway” so many times the police knew my face by heart. My first attempt came at six years old. I did not make it far that day, but as I grew older, the distance I put between myself and the quicksand of dysfunction I was born into increased.

I had taken to “hitch hiking” as a means of transportation.

It was six months before my fifteenth birthday and my home life had grown progressively worse as my stepfather, who was my abuser, began to lose interest in me after the age of fourteen. He had moved on to molest other children despite my attempts to report him to doctors, teachers and other responsible adults. My efforts were met with punishments from my family that included death threats, three broken ribs and re-victimization, as the female teacher I confided in began to molest me.

According to Ryan C. W. Hall, MD, and Richard C. W. Hall, MD, PA in their publication “A Profile of

Pedophilia” Federal statistics for all reported sexual assaults showed that 34 percent of sexually abused children were younger than 12 years and 33 percent were between the ages of 12 and 17 years.

A bimodal age distribution was found for the age of the abused child for all sexual assaults, with peaks occurring at 5 and 14 years of age. In all cases, except for rape, more than half of those abused were younger than 12 years. Females were the most commonly abused, with the percentage of abused females increasing with age.

It was in the early morning hours of a Wednesday morning in late summer that I decided to escape my toxic environment in search of something better. I tried to be quiet as I dabbed iodine across the cut under my eye and groaned in pain at the ache of my bruised ribs. The memory of the encounter with my intoxicated stepfather the night before was still playing in my mind like a bad sitcom. My stepfather had molested me since the age of five. At age twelve I had told a doctor that I was being molested and after a particularly brutal beating from my family I felt like there was just no escape. I attempted suicide, or rather succeeded after ingesting sleeping pills and alcohol.

I was clinically dead for three minutes until I awakened to the surprise of the emergency room doctors.

With the determination to leave behind the madness of my situation I prepared to depart on that late summer’s morning. My thoughts were that this time I would make it, I would disappear and they would never find me. I had no plan other than to loose myself somewhere that they could not follow, and for this had chosen to go to California. I would find someplace near Mexico so that if I found myself backed into a corner, I could make a run for the border.

I slung my backpack and my sleeping bag over my shoulder and with fifty dollars in my pocket I began to put the world that had held me prisoner far behind me. I walked and hitched rides with people until after a month of sleeping in doorways and begging for food, I arrived on the outskirts of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. My trip had become sidetracked for several reasons, the main reason being you seldom find someone who is going exactly where you want to go. I had also worked for a few days here and there.

When kind souls offered a hot meal and a place to sleep, I trusted my intuition and accepted those offers that seemed genuine. Outside Milwaukee I found an abandoned cabin that provided shelter from a fast approaching winter. I was running low on cash so I decided to explore the surrounding area the next day to look for odd jobs.

I had spotted lights in the distance as I had entered the cabin the night before so I set off early to explore the possibility of at least one meal for that day. A clearing loomed in the distance and beyond I could hear the sound of cows, marking the location of a dairy farm.

I decided to approach the barn where I could see someone just beyond the doorway and it was then that I met the woman who would haunt my dreams from that day forward.

Her name was Cheyenne. She was Native American, and the most beautiful woman I had ever laid eyes on. Her long black hair shone against her olive skin as her dark brown eyes met mine. She was fourteen at the time and she had fled South Dakota at the age of twelve to escape an abusive father and was searching for something better.

The farm belonged to an elderly couple that had lost their son in Vietnam and their hearts longed to heal

from that loss. Providing shelter to runaways provided a temporary solace for them. They gave us both a warm place to sleep and kept the questions to a minimum and for a while I thought the past would never find me.

Cheyenne and I grew close and after three months she began to tell me the secret behind the scars that marked her body and the ones that she kept hidden inside.

After leaving South Dakota at the age of twelve, Cheyenne had drifted around much the same as I had until one day she had the misfortune of crossing paths with the face of evil. While she was sleeping in an abandoned car on the outskirts of Denver, Cheyenne was grabbed by three men and thrown into the trunk of a car. She had been knocked unconscious by a blow to the head and when she woke up she was in a warehouse locked in a small room with twenty other women. From that point on Cheyenne tried to escape the sex traffickers who had grabbed her, but routine beatings and forced drug use had left her too weak to break free.

For almost a year Cheyenne had been imprisoned and it was fate that would finally secure her freedom. She was being held in a warehouse somewhere near downtown Chicago when a fight broke out between the men who had held her captive. A nearby gas stove was overturned and a fire had started.

In the chaos of the burning building, Cheyenne escaped. She ran until her feet could no longer carry her and after sleeping in the woods for days had come upon the same dairy farm where we had both found refuge. Cheyenne cried as she told me her story and as I help her in my arms as we fell asleep together.

For the first time in years I cried. I wept not only for Cheyenne and the suffering she endured, but also for the child inside me that had suffered so much.

As the months and the seasons progressed Cheyenne and I grew incredibly close and I could feel myself falling for her. I felt as if I could almost touch my dreams of happiness. I think back to that moment and wish I could once again lose myself in the innocence of that time, because soon after, forces would intervene that would bring an end to our paradise.

We had both tried so hard to hide from the darkness of our past but in the end it finally caught up to Cheyenne and both of our lives were forever changed. The elderly couple that became our benefactors often journeyed into the suburbs of Milwaukee to sell the vegetables they grew at a farmers market, as a means of income. As we returned from these occasional trips, we often stopped at the same restaurant near the interstate to have lunch.

It was late Saturday morning one spring day as we drove back from a successful trip to the Farmers Market. As we made our regular stop for lunch Cheyenne and I were excited as our conversation focused on the prospect of spending the money we had earned to see a movie later that night. We finished our lunch and exited the restaurant with Cheyenne in the lead. Suddenly four men emerged from a nearby van wearing masks and ran toward us heading straight for Cheyenne. The sex traffickers who had held her prisoner for almost a year had finally tracked her down.

I could see the fear in Cheyenne's eyes and I immediately inserted myself in between the men and where she stood. Although I fought with all my might two of them grabbed her and began dragging her towards the van nearby. I made one last attempt as one of the men picked up a broken bottle and swung it at me.

It struck my arm and I began to bleed profusely but I would not let this deter my momentum. Suddenly everything went dark as I was struck from behind with a lead pipe.

When I woke up I was in a hospital and Cheyenne was gone. I could see the elderly couple standing outside the room talking to police. I quickly found my clothes and discovering that I was on the first floor, dressed and slipped out an open window.

I searched for Cheyenne and eventually found the warehouse in Chicago that was now burned to the ground.

Sometime later the police picked me up as I attempted to track the sex traffickers who took Cheyenne away. I was returned home and eventually graduated from High School, joining the United States Marine Corps.

I have never stopped looking for Cheyenne and I think of her often. I still bear the scar of the stab wound from the broken bottle, as I left before it could be properly stitched up, and it reminds me that the evil in this world must be fought with all our strength. As I stare at the faces of the missing, I see Cheyenne in each one of them. I hope that I can see her again one day and that she will have found the same peace that I have.

In my dreams Cheyenne is still on that dairy farm in Wisconsin. I see her lying beside me on the warm grass as we watch the clouds drift by where, for first time in our lives we had found happiness.

I hope you will join me in the search for missing and exploited children and help to rescue the next Cheyenne before the evil in this world extinguishes the light in their eyes. Although these children may be missing they will never be lost, as long as we keep them in our hearts and remember the hope that tomorrow will find them in our arms once again.

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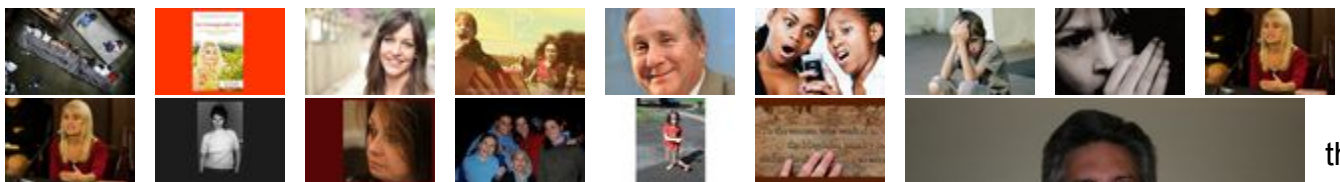


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Raised
in
the
south,
I joined
the
United
States
Marine

Corps at the age of seventeen and spent the next eight years seeing the world. After my enlistment was finished I attended college and graduated to work in the Biotechnology sector.

I have struggled against many things in my life including childhood sexual abuse and somehow I found a way to survive. Writing is my passion and it keeps me in touch with the wealth everyone holds deep inside their hearts and minds.

I am married with two beautiful children, and they have made my life complete. I have written all my life and enjoy creating lyrics as well as novels. I enjoy spending time with my children and teaching them about music, art, nature and the value of family.

Contact Jerome Elam



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