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Silent Victims

In this issue of *The Compass* an ECSU student tells how she struggled and eventually came to terms with the trauma of being raped by her father when she was 12 years old. Such attacks on children are tragically on the rise in our nation, and they are getting worse. No facet of our society is free from this ugly secret. Adult victims include people in all walks of life, doctors, teachers, construction workers, librarians and celebrities, including a former Miss America.

This year a group of New England residents appeared on a national TV program to reveal that as children they had been sexually abused by a Catholic priest. What's especially tragic about this case is the young victims never told their parents what had happened: many of them, like the ECSU student attacked by her father, believed they were somehow in the wrong. In cases like these, adult family members and religious leaders are usually all-powerful and even God-like to children, and the children are silent victims with no frame of reference for a defense.

Closer to home is the Edendon "Little Rascals" case. Without commenting on the guilt or innocence of the individuals charged, we would like to point out many well-meaning individuals not only refuse to face up to this ugly problem in our society, they display a tendency to blame the victims, to refuse to believe their testimony, to cry "witch hunt," when the brutal crimes of those who prey on children are brought to light.

This kind of attitude only allows pedophiles to operate with impunity. In case after tragic case, adults who could have helped put a stop to the abuse, didn't—often out of a stubborn and blind inability to admit that the offenders were guilty of such heinous behavior.

We urge any ECSU student who has been sexually abused as a child to get counselling, "to let the pain out," as the student writer says.

And protect your own children from this kind of abuse by being vigilant and careful; never leave your child alone with any individual whom you do not know and trust.

Possible signs of child abuse include: unexplained tantrums, bedwetting, nightmares, and withdrawing from people. If your child ever displays any of these signs, see a skilled therapist immediately.

The physical damage of sexual abuse can heal in days or weeks, but the emotional scars can last a lifetime.

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THE COMPASS welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should be sent to ECSU Box 815, Elizabeth City, NC 27909. All letters must be signed and include the writer's address and telephone number. They may be edited for length, clarity, and taste, as well as accuracy and grammar. Because of limited space, not all letters can be published.



GUEST COLUMN

Counselling The Key to surviving the pain of past sexual assault

(ECSU student's name withheld by request)

The main event in the shaping of who I am happened when I was twelve years old. After my parents got divorced, I decided to live with my father and brother. My older two sisters stayed with our mother. I had been living with my father for about six months when one night I was awakened by a sharp pain, and I realized there was a man on top of me.

I tried screaming, but he had his hand over my mouth. I kicked, punched, scratched—anything I could think of to get him off of me, but he was too strong. He finished what he was doing, got up and went into the kitchen. I ran into my dad's room to tell him what had happened, but he wasn't there; he was in the kitchen. He was the only person in the kitchen.

That's when I realized my father had raped me.

I called my mom the next day and went to live with her. My father told me that if I told her what had happened, she would be mad at me, so I just said that I changed my mind and wanted to live with her.

I was sixteen before I told anyone what had happened, because I thought I was the one who was in the wrong. I had problems with my boyfriend because I didn't want to have sex with him. I thought that it would be like what had happened with my father, and I didn't want that to happen again. I refused to have sex with him, and I also refused to talk to him about it. He broke up with me because I wouldn't talk to him about why I didn't want to have sex. I finally broke down and told him everything. He assured me that it wasn't supposed to have happened and that when I was ready, it would not be like that. He told me that it wasn't my fault, and my father should be punished for what he did, so I pressed charges against him.

I started counselling a few days after

pressing charges. I saw the doctor twice a week for two years. My father was arrested and stayed in jail for eight weeks before I decided to drop charges. Instead of sending him to prison, I settled for a restraining order. He could not come near me, my older sisters, or any girl under the age of seventeen.

I had a personal restraining order which stated that he could not come near me, or have any contact with me whatsoever until I was twenty-one years old. I haven't seen him since that day in court.

This event and its aftermath has obviously changed my life. What my father did changed it in a bad way; it could even have been fatal if I hadn't gotten counselling. Before counselling, I had been insecure, shallow, and hardly had any morals. Now I am happy. I have my self-respect back, and I don't get depressed as often about it. I still think about the whole painful ordeal every now and then, but not as much as a few years ago.

I still don't like for any man to touch me, except for my boyfriend of five years, but I don't get hyper anymore if a man accidentally bumps into me. The restraining order has run out, but I haven't seen my father in four years. I do believe that I could stand another four. He was always proclaimed his innocence; even to this day he will tell him that it didn't happen.

I haven't forgiven him, and I most definitely haven't forgotten. It is hard to forgive someone who says that he hasn't done anything to be forgiven for.

I would like to stress the importance of counselling in helping me cope with the pain and trauma of my experience. If I hadn't gotten counselling, I would not have been able to evolve into the emotionally stable person I am today.

If you are, or have been sexually attacked or abused—by your father, date, or even a stranger—get counselling. The pain needs to be let out.