

## VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENT

For so long I've questioned whether my sexual abuse was my fault. Whether I could have been a little stronger, stayed up at a night a little longer, yelled out for help a little louder or told someone different than the adults I trusted to come rescue me from my daily hell. I was 9 years old when the sexual abuse started. I was groomed at an early age to comply and I was told this is what father's do that love their daughters. I now know that what I experienced at the hands of Joseph Thomas was not normal, nor was it the fault of a 9-year-old child. No, I will no longer carry the guilt, shame, and pain that belongs to Joseph Thomas. For the better part of my life I could not understand what was wrong with me. Why I constantly jumped out of my sleep at night; why my attendance was always so poor at work; why I was and am still constantly paralyzed with fear at night; why I only take showers in complete darkness; why I could emotionally detach from everyone and everything around me; why I felt dead internally no matter how much I tried to fake being alive; why I did not feel proud of any of my accomplishments; why I had zero self-confidence.

It was because from the age of 9 until I was in my early 20's he would come into my room every night and touch me inappropriately while he masturbated. He would climb walls outside of my bedroom to watch me dress and undress. He would watch me through peep holes in my bedroom door. He had placed a chair outside of the house under the bathroom window to stand in it and watch me get in and out of the bathtub. That chair remained outside the bathroom window even after I told my mother what he was doing in it. He would make me bend over while he masturbated and touched my vagina, which is why I still can't stand the smell of Jergens lotion this day, it triggers the memory, smell and sound of him pleasuring himself. I had no privacy and lived in a constant state of fear as a child. Fear that tonight would be the same as all the other nights. I would have to stay up and keep watch to ensure the "monster" didn't get me. I allowed my younger siblings to sleep with me, for protection, but that did not matter. The next morning I couldn't keep my eyes open at school, or I would miss the bus from staying awake the night before because I needed to stay vigilant to keep myself from being violated. In my mind if I was awake he could not get me. He would do all of this while my mother laid in the next room night after night pretending to be sleeping and oblivious to what was happening right under her nose. Every single time these incidents happened I would tell my mother and He

would either apologize for the incident or he would say I took the interaction the wrong way. So as a child I always felt like I had done the right thing by telling, only to learn that later that night I would relive my personal hell all over again, so I felt overwhelming fear, crippling anxiety, numbness and completely powerless.

In addition to sexually assaulting me, He also seemed to relish in the power that came with controlling our household and me. If I locked my door to protect myself or blocked the door with baskets to alert me that he was coming in, he would go off about me locking my door or blocking the doorway. He would say, "Don't lock no doors in my house." And my mother would respond by reminding me that he was in control. She would say, "You've got to respect him. That's your new father."

I was robbed of my innocence and a normal childhood both of which I can never get back. These assaults caused me to lead a very self-destructive life, I attempted to harm myself, because I felt like that was the only way to escape the constant hell I lived in internally. I never turned to drugs, but I did many destructive things as a child because my self-esteem was low. I remember being 16, 17, and my boyfriend and I were actively not using protection. I was trying to get pregnant for years, because I felt like if I got pregnant then it would stop. I finally got pregnant at 18, but the abuse did not stop. My way of coping with the debilitating fear was to never be alone, so I went from bad relationship, to bad relationship until I finally got myself some help. I had no emotion, no feelings, and I compartmentalized everything. I was not capable of loving anything or anybody, most of all I hated myself, I felt like damaged goods.

It wasn't until I turned 30 and started to seek professional help that I learned that I suffer from severe anxiety disorder, PTSD, and depression. To this day, I attend therapy every two weeks and I see a psychiatrist once a month to monitor my anxiety and sleep medication of which I will probably need for the rest of my life. I live in a state of constant fear at night. I wake up screaming, don't sleep at all, or I jump out of my sleep thinking somebody is touching me or standing over me. I can only take a shower in darkness to ensure nobody can see me. While I remind myself that the physical hell is over, the mental hell I live in will never be over. Every day is a mental battle. I have to constantly reassure myself that nobody is coming into my room at night and that I'm finally safe.

On December 12, 2017, I walked in the police department and reported the sexual abuse I had suffered during my youth. When Detective Price informed me, the only way for us to get justice was for me to wear a wire, I was terrified. I promised him, if he would help me through the fear, I would do what I needed to do to ensure not another little girl would suffer the way I did; if I could just will myself to do this I could finally take some of my power back, so I agreed to wear the wire and have the conversation with my mother and him. On February 18, 2018, I put on the wire and entered their home, and it was during that interaction, that he said, "You were not that innocent at 9 years old." In that moment I felt violated again, this monster actually attempted to make me responsible for my own abuse, he blamed me for his sick behavior and it made me feel powerless, vulnerable, and weak. I hated him all over again for victimizing me again and again. What kind of husband, father, man, blames an innocent child for their own abuse? To me that statement exposed the person he really is, it made it very clear that he knew what he was doing and felt entitled to keep doing it. That statement confirmed to me that He was capable of violating another child that statement wasn't made 30 years ago that statement was made in February of 2018. His thought process and lack of moral compass shows he is not remorseful, and feels like he is above reproach because he got away with sexually abusing me for so long. People quit smoking, they quit drinking but they don't just stop sexually abusing children.

It was time for me to break the curses that have plagued this family from generation to generation. Instead of it continuing to 'run in the family' I want to make sure this is where it runs out. I want to ensure not another little girl will have to deal with my personal hell. I wanted to stand for the countless little girls who will never get justice or who did not have the voice or power to STAND up to their abuser. Today, I Rose like A Phoenix from the ashes of my past and confronted the scared little girl who lived within....Like a Phoenix from the Ashes of my past, still I Rise.

~Tiffany