



Listening & Learning: Stories of Survivors

Hope and Healing in the Diocese of Albany

A Conversation with Ringo Halliday

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Ringo Halliday is a victim/survivor of childhood sexual abuse. His main abuser was his mother. Ringo was very open to talking to our Hope and Healing committee and stressed his desire to help other survivors.

The biggest message he wanted to stress: A victim/survivor needs to know they are believed. The statement "I believe you" is important to a victim/survivor.

Ringo was sexually abused by his mother, started self-harmed around age 12, experienced suicidal thoughts by age 14, and his mother died when he was 15. After his mother's death, he began bottling up what had happened to him and did not share or talk about it. He has some family members who still do not believe he was abused.

In his early 20's he began cutting himself again. He attempted suicide - went to the Green Island Bridge one evening but too many people around were around so he sat on a bench near the bridge, took a picture of the bridge, and posted on Facebook with the caption "Tonight's the night". Someone in a bar nearby saw the post, left the bar and found Ringo. The stranger talked with him for an hour until he knew Ringo would not jump. This stranger saved his life.

Therapy History:

- As a young man, he lived in a small New Hampshire town. He and his girlfriend were having difficulties, so he sought counseling. The clinic seemed to be a place where therapists would start their careers and were very new at the profession. It was all he could afford. He felt not believed - he was told that boys are not abused, and a mother would never abuse her son. He felt the counselor was not listening to him - more of a grief counselor and uncomfortable with the subject of sexual abuse. Ringo did not last long.
- He first told his story anonymously on an internet forum.
- In 2016, he and his wife experienced challenges in their relationship - particularly with intimacy - and at that point, he told his wife of his abuse. She insisted he go to therapy and helped him find St. Peter's Crime Victims Assistance, which he



still goes to today. St. Peter's made him feel believed and comfortable enough to talk about his abuse.

- He joined a men's support group through St. Peter's and finds this very beneficial.

St. Peter's has an event every year called Walk a Mile in Her Shoes. Ringo participated in this event several times. Months prior to the walk, victim/survivors are asked if they would to tell their stories at the gathering after the walk. The first couple of years Ringo did not feel he could share his story to a crowd, but he eventually accepted the invitation, prepared what he would say and got up and spoke. He received great support and validation from audience members, a few came up to him and said, "me too". One attendee was so moved he asked permission to give Ringo a hug. (Reminder: it is important to ask permission before hugging or touching a survivor). He joined the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) speaker forum and has become more comfortable telling his story – though it is still difficult.

Why does Ringo tell his story? Ringo feels it is important to let victims of abuse know they are not alone, particularly men. One out of six boys and one out of four girls are abused. Chances are everyone knows someone who has been abused. Many are suffering in silence. Men feel particularly alone and embarrassed. Society tells men they are weak if they cry, something is wrong with them if their abuser was a woman and they did not enjoy the sex or if their abuser was a man, they are weak or gay. Some of the forums Ringo is involved in he still sees people questioning if what happened to them really was abuse or assault (date rape).

Words of Advice:

1. Believe the victim/survivor.
2. Have information on hand for help – hotline numbers, local therapy and support groups.
3. Events you might hold, such as Healing Masses – have therapist and counselors on hand. Create business cards with hotline information.
4. Victim/survivors will not come forward until they feel comfortable. Cannot start a dialogue if the survivor does not trust and does not feel believed. Be Trauma Informed – focus shift – from "what's wrong with you?" to "what happened to you?" Avoid "re-traumatizing" – do not "interrogate" but allow victim/survivor to tell their story with no judgement or questioning.
5. The healing journey is not linear. Victim/survivors are not "cured". Setbacks occur. Example – This past Memorial Day Ringo was extremely emotional – his mother was a veteran and he was missing her. However, he was also angry with her for what she did to him. Extreme mix of emotions, triggers are out there, flashbacks occur.