

Lori Cunningham  
Belfast  
LD 975

I am a 64 year old wife, mother, and grandmother, residing in Belfast, At an early age, I was sexually assaulted by a family member on multiple occasions while our parents played cards. I was not threatened, that I can remember, but It was not to be discussed after our visits. I did what was asked. When this person married, we were invited to the ceremony and I wanted nothing to do with him, let alone hug and congratulate him. He probably never noticed, but my family knew something was up. I held on to the promise not to tell until I was in my 60's. Once I told my Mother, she said she knew nothing about it, but I described the act and she took me seriously. It has upset me because, she still visits with him, although only in a group situation, never alone.

Growing up in the 60's and 70's, our family had enough to get by, but there were no frills. My Dad was self employed and my Mother took children into her home, I remember playing Dr.. with some of the little boys in a playhouse we had down back. This involved pulling down their pants and fondling them. I didn't know at the time, this wasn't acceptable, I didn't hurt them and they didn't cry. Eventually my mother took a better paying job out of the house. By this time I was ten or twelve. My sister and I played with the neighborhood children, mostly boys. We were home after school and summers, our friends were our neighbors. We played games, told stories, and eventually that led to games that involved taking off our clothes and touching. Thankfully, by the time I was in the 9th grade, the neighborhood children were sophomores and juniors and we did not play those games or hangout anymore. Then came the boy I met a school. As we became more friendly, we wanted to explore acts beyond hugging and kissing. We practiced safe sex and used a condom always, as we knew we were not ready to be parents. On one occasion his parents came home, unexpectedly, we dressed quickly and straightening up the area. My boyfriend went to the bathroom to remove the condom and announced to me later it had ripped. We knew we had to think quickly and I went to Family Planning to tell my story. I asked if I could take something to prevent pregnancy and they explained a pill called "the morning after" which I gladly accepted, as we was too young to become parents. The boyfriend at the time, became my husband after I graduated. Two years later, we wanted to start our family and eventually I became pregnant. We had a healthy baby boy and with the help of our parents, the child had everything he needed to thrive. Eventually my husband lost his job and we struggled to make ends meet. By the time the child was 18 mos.,we split up, he became aggressive and very jealous, striking me once. I also learned he had been cheating. We eventually got divorced and 4 years later I met and eventually married the love of my life and with the help of birth control pills, we were able to plan when to start our family and had two more children. This is called planned parent hood. Upon the birth of my third child, we had decided our family was complete and scheduled to have my tubes tied when they performed the c-section. This is called responsible parenting. When our daughter wanted to become sexually active, she came to us and we gave her options to prevent pregnancy until she was ready to parent. She and her husband have two girls now, they both work and provide for their family with out any government assistance. It takes two people, with incomes to provide for a family. Our daughter has an IUD. If you should take away that right, she would likely become pregnant again and again and they simply can not afford to feed and cloth more children. I urge you to fully consider the consequences of criminalizing abortion and banning the use of contraceptives. It should be the right of the female only to decide if she wants to bear children. I would certainly hope you would encourage a physicians recommendations when it involves terminating a pregnancy.