

Good Morning, Representative Mary Whiteford and
Members of the Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
THANK you for allowing me to be here.

My Name is Rita O'Brien.

I live in Vicksburg Michigan.

I am a social worker, working with survivors at a Domestic Violence shelter
in Three Rivers.

I grew up in a violent abusive home, seeing dishes flung
across the room on a regular basis. I was raped and sexually abused
From the age of 3 to 13. I was sexually attacked at night by my father, and
other men from a secret society and cult church - I thought it was all
"Normal." For a punishment, I was shocked by a horse fence on many
occasions, so I learned not to feel anything.

I was not allowed to have food unless I was a "good little girl" and let the
men molest or rape me. If I did get something "special," like a McDonald's
shake, it had drugs in it to make me and the other kids sleep.

I just wanted to SURVIVE-

When I went to school I got yelled at by some of the teachers, who said I
could not sit still, and sometimes fell asleep in class. I had problems sitting
still because of the pain from my assaults. I also did not sleep much at home.
I would wake up sore down there- and the pain was awful. I had bladder and
kidney infections, asthma and pneumonias. I was seen at the hospital every
year from age 3-13 but NOBODY saw the bruises inside. Most of the time in
the hospital I was alone, as mom was at work.

At school the other kids picked on me, because I was the kid with the weird
dad who did awful things to me and other kids. How come the kids Knew
and Nobody did anything? Did they hear this from their parents? Why did
the parents take no action?

I just wanted to play and be a kid like other kids, but my childhood was stolen from me. I never got to be a kid.

My grandfather was the only one in the family who suspected what was going on. He would see the cars pull into the driveway, and would yell, "Rita, get over here right now!" He would yell at me to make my dad think he was being mean to me. But once I got inside, he let me watch "Little House on the Prairie," and he would LOVE me and let me sit on his lap. He gave me the most important thing - TIME and yummy frozen Red Haven Peaches

Life not having a childhood affected me in later years.
I do not have very many close friends.
I have had two failed marriages (we have since talked.)
There are no hard feelings. My kids dad had no idea what I went through and it definitely wrecked my marriage.

When I had my kids, I had terrible post partum depression
I was afraid to hold and love my kids, fearing that what had happened to me would be "passed" to them if I held them and loved them. They are ok now but it has taken years for them to understand what was "WRONG" with me .

Struggle is real. I slap on a happy face to fight this fight that nobody would want to fight. I am STILL here, living right next door to the house I was trafficked from.

I currently live with my mom taking care of her
as she is slowly fading away. I do my best to make things count
for her as I don't know how much time she has left.
She did the best she could with how we were living.
She did not KNOW my dad was trading me to men at night
She worked the opposite shift from my dad.

The abuser who trafficked me (MY dad) is long gone- but my family still has problems. The remnants of selfish sexual desires had its price. By the grace of GOD, and some good people, I have risen above my circumstances and will be the voice help set others free. I am a board member of the Kalamazoo Area Anti-Human Trafficking Coalition. Sara, the founder, was the first person I spoke to, in order to make sense of the dark thing in my life that I could not make sense of. I am a member of the Michigan Abolitionist Project. I am also a board member of Pearls of Great Price, which tries to educate the public about human trafficking. I am also a member of the Michigan Human Task Force, and SOAP. Both groups help me link survivors to resources. Of equal importance to me are the personal relationships I have established within these groups, and beyond. Through the help of these people, I have been able to figure out how to become a valued friend. At age 50, I can now say I have several good friends who I value, and who value me.

There are currently 41 missing kids in Michigan!

That is 41 too many. I would LOVE for Michigan to be the next state to make it mandatory to have age appropriate Human Trafficking education in all the schools, including public, private, home schools, and even colleges.

I would love Michigan to be the state the traffickers RUN from, having seen educational posters in every bathroom restaurant and gas station in Michigan.

Maybe if I would have seen such a sign as a child- maybe I would have known HOW to get help and WHO to call?

I plead with you to get more houses for survivors that are supportive and have staff who are trauma informed. Please pass a bill and make it a law that all educational places must educate ALL children on how to stay SAFE from trafficking.

William Wilberforce said, "You may choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know."

If we EDUCATE our state about Human Trafficking

We will all be in the "KNOW" and can help this generation and the next

Set others free.

Thank you for your TIME- It really means a lot to me