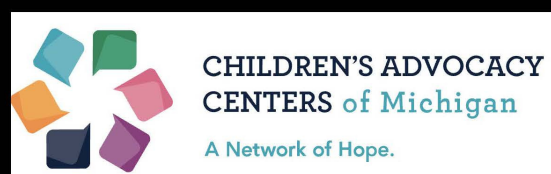


WHAT WERE YOU WEARING?

The Role of Victim-Blaming & Indifference in Facilitating & Perpetuating Gender-Based Crimes: An Immersive, Survivor-Centered Exhibit



July 29-30, 2026
Huntington Place, Detroit, Michigan



Curator: Mary Simmerling PhD

Co-Curators: Denise Huskins DPT, Aaron Quinn DPT, Jen Murphy, Suzy Boylan JD,
Chris McGhee, Nichole & Jim Schmidt, Small Talk Children's Advocacy Center

A CO-PRODUCTION OF

WRITE WHERE WE BELONG  **THE WRONG QUESTIONS PROJECT**

writewherewebelong.ca · thewrongquestionsproject.org

Content Warning

This exhibit centres on the lived experiences of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. It contains depictions and descriptions of sexual abuse, rape, and domestic violence, including assaults involving minors and the murder of women and children. The materials include representations of clothing worn during assaults, survivor testimony, and direct language about violent and traumatic experiences. It also includes audio and video clips related to specific incidents and stories.

This exhibit contains distressing and upsetting material, including graphic materials. It may evoke strong emotional responses. Please proceed with care and consider your own comfort, boundaries, and well-being as you move through this space.

If at any point you feel overwhelmed, it is okay to step away. Your well-being comes first. If you need support, please reach out to someone you trust or contact a support service. RAINN's National Sexual Assault Hotline is available 24/7 at 800.656.HOPE (4673) or online at online.rainn.org (English) or rainn.org/es (Spanish). These services are free, confidential, and anonymous.

You are not alone.

SERIES NOTE

What Were You Wearing? Documentary Field Notes from the Exhibits is a site-specific record of the expanded 2026 *What Were You Wearing?* exhibition series.

Each volume in this *Field Notes* series documents one exhibit site in the 2026 tour. The repeated materials create continuity across the series: the curatorial statement, the history of the exhibits, the poem, the architecture of impunity framework, and the biographies of the curator and co-curators. The site-specific materials locate each exhibit in the community where it appears: the local data, the venue, the public record, the partners, the installation images, and the questions this exhibit asks of that audience.

These *Field Notes* are not a catalogue in the conventional sense. They are part of the exhibit. They preserve the record after the physical installation comes down. They carry forward the stories, images, data, and documentary evidence that make the patterns visible. They are also part of the shared work of Write Where We Belong and The Wrong Questions Project, where writing, publishing, public art, and exhibition practice function together as testimony, record, and resistance.

The work is documentary, but it is not neutral. It is survivor-centred, evidentiary, and deliberately structured to make visible what is too often minimized, laundered, proceduralized, or dismissed. The boards are not illustrations. They are documentation. The clothing, the words, the statistics, the records, and the images are part of the argument. They are part of the evidence.

The question at the centre of this series is the question the exhibits ask again and again: What evidence would have been enough?

Enough to believe her. Enough to protect the child. Enough to interrupt the escalation. Enough to act before the violence became catastrophic.

ABOUT THE CO-PRODUCERS

These *Field Notes*, and the exhibit they document, are a co-production of Write Where We Belong and The Wrong Questions Project.

Write Where We Belong

Write Where We Belong is a Canadian literary and arts organization and an artists' ecosystem for change, created from the belief that each of us is born with creative genius and that the creative self has the power to heal—not only the self, but the world we live in. Across workshops, publishing, public art, and exhibition practice, the work is grounded in a simple but demanding premise: healing requires truth. (writewherewebelong.ca)

The Wrong Questions Project

The Wrong Questions Project is a survivor-led, survivor-centred, and surviving-family-centred public arts educational program: an educational intervention built to expose and upend victim-blaming. Its premise is direct. If we keep asking victims, survivors, and surviving family members the wrong questions, we will keep producing the wrong answers. And the wrong answers do not end violence. They perpetuate and enable it.

The project works through a modular exhibit framework organized around three victim-blaming questions—*What Were You Wearing?*, *Why Didn't She Just Leave?*, and *Why Didn't You Just Tell Someone?*—which can be installed individually, in combination, or as a fully integrated installation. The exhibit documented in these *Field Notes* is the first of those three modules. (thewrongquestionsproject.org)

HOW TO READ THESE *FIELD NOTES*

These *Field Notes* are designed to be read as a documentary and curatorial record.

They bring together curatorial writing, survivor testimony, representative clothing, exhibit photographs, poems, public data, documentary records, biographies, and site-specific analysis. These forms are meant to be read together. The images are not illustrations. They are documentation. The poems are not ornament. They are part of the record. The data is not background. It is part of the structure that makes the stories legible.

Each exhibit asks viewers to hold the individual and the structural together. The individual boards matter because the lives represented on them matter. But the boards also ask us to step back far enough to see the repeated mechanisms: grooming, coercion, silencing, victim-blaming, disbelief, institutional failure, and the normalization of harm. The names may differ. The dates may differ. The pattern does not.

Some pages in these *Field Notes* document the physical installation itself: the storyboards, the clothing, the objects, the lighting, the QR codes, and the way the exhibit came to life in a particular venue or room. Other pages provide the site-specific record: the violence data, the local and state context, the institutional failures, and the reasons this exhibit belongs in this place, with this audience, at this time.

Read the repeated sections as part of the architecture of the series. They create continuity across the tour. Read the site-specific sections as the audit specific to that location. In Dallas, that means reading the exhibit in relation to the Conference on Crimes Against Women, Texas domestic violence data, sexual assault kit backlogs, trafficking corridors, Dallas vulnerability, and MMIW-Texas. In South Carolina, it meant reading the exhibit in relation to domestic violence homicides, sexual assault, untested rape kits, Charleston's student population, nightlife vulnerability, and the public commitment made by North Charleston Mayor Reggie Burgess to take additional action on untested rape kits.

The *Field Notes* also preserve what happens around the exhibit: who built it, who stood with it, who encountered it, who responded to it, and what commitments emerged because of it. In

Charleston, the exhibit generated press coverage, community engagement, and a public commitment to address untested rape kits. That matters. The work is not only to witness harm after the fact, but to interrupt the systems that allow the harm to continue.

The phrase *architecture of impunity* names the structure these exhibits make visible. Impunity is not merely the absence of punishment. It is produced through mutually reinforcing mechanisms: disbelief, linguistic laundering, institutional self-protection, managed records, and procedural indifference. In my 2026 book *The Architecture of Impunity: A Forensic Audit of Modern Predation*, I describe this work as a forensic audit of those mechanisms: how harm is normalized, narrated, minimized, and denied.

The same method guides these *Field Notes*. Each exhibit is a site-specific audit. Each volume asks what the public record shows when survivor testimony, local data, institutional response, and documentary evidence are brought together in a single experiential container.

As you experience the exhibit, watch for the mechanisms.

Notice who is believed first.

Listen to who is asked to explain.

Observe how violence is softened into conflict, misunderstanding, poor judgment, or procedure.

Notice how institutions mobilize to preserve themselves.

Trace what happens after survivors speak.

And then return, again, to the question beneath the entire exhibit:

What evidence would have been enough?

Curatorial Statement

Mary Simmerling, Ph.D., Founder and Principal, Write Where We Belong

This exhibit was born from the same convictions and commitments that shape all my work: the belief that our stories, when shared, have the power to shift what we understand as possible. It has its roots in the poem, "What I Was Wearing," which I wrote in the aftermath of trying to navigate a world unchanged by the sexual violence that forever changed me. I wrote the poem to try to make sense of the recurring questions I was asked after I disclosed that I had been assaulted, including the question "What were you wearing?" My answer was so boring and mundane. I had been wearing a white t-shirt and a jean skirt. But the poem resonated with other survivors. They saw themselves reflected back in my words. My poem became their poem. Our stories came together because we share a common vocabulary, one that foregrounds the voices of survivors.

I have long believed that justice is inseparable from voice, and that we are indivisible from ourselves and each other. Moral repair begins in the act of speaking, writing, and being heard - particularly in community. Storytelling is, itself, an act of moral repair. I believe our stories stand on their own. They do not require interpretation, translation, or gatekeeping from anyone. They are an articulation of lived experience and acts of resistance against erasure. They are not only about survival, but about meaning-making: how we continue, create, and connect in a world that is not yet safe for us. Through Write Where We Belong, writing, publishing, public art, and exhibition practice function together as testimony, record, and resistance.

This is a survivor-centred exhibit that pairs survivors' words with representative clothing, contextual statistics, documentary records, and related audio and video in order to challenge victim-blaming and make the structures visible. The work is designed to make the patterns legible while still honouring the singularity of each story. The individual boards matter because the lives represented on them matter. But these boards also ask viewers to understand those lives in relation to one another, to the institutions around them, and to the repeated mechanisms through which violence is made possible and then normalized.

This exhibit does not bring stories that do not belong here. It brings to light stories that are already here. While the exact names and dates and details may differ, the mechanisms

represented in these boards are already operative here too. We know what is happening in our homes and relationships, in schools and churches, in medicine, sport, policing, and the courts. We know it from the women and girls who are assaulted and killed, from the children who are abused by people they know, from the victims who are groomed, disbelieved, and abandoned, and from the case records that remain after the fact.

The stories on these boards are not meant to create distance. Sometimes it is hardest to see what is closest to us. If you hold a piece of paper too close to your face, you cannot really read the words on it. They have not disappeared. They are still there. But the proximity distorts them, just like familiarity can distort reality. Sometimes it is the thing that is right in front of us that we cannot see clearly.

When I was a young girl, my father, who was a watercolor artist, used to teach me how to look at things differently. As he was finishing a painting, he would sometimes turn it upside down on the easel and tell me to walk back ten or twelve steps. Then he would ask me what I could see and what I saw differently. That taught me a lot about how to see differently. Over time, I carried that skill into my work with survivors. I look for patterns, exemplars, and systems. I have learned to see structures and patterns rather than what may appear to be isolated incidents.

These boards are not illustrations. They are documentation. The clothing, the words, the statistics, and the records are part of the argument. They are part of the evidence. What comes into focus, when we step back far enough to see it, is not merely a collection of individual stories, but a set of repeated mechanisms: grooming, coercion, silencing, victim-blaming, disbelief, institutional failure, and the normalization of harm. The names may differ. The dates may differ. The pattern does not.

That is part of what this exhibit asks this community to do. To look again. To step back far enough to see the patterns. To hold in view not only the assaults themselves, but the infrastructure that made them repeatable. And beneath so many of these boards is the same question: What evidence would have been enough? Enough to believe her. Enough to protect the child. Enough to interrupt the escalation. Enough to act before the violence became catastrophic.

The 2026 exhibition model expands the original installations by moving beyond what survivors wore to document what happened after they spoke. It traces what institutions heard - and what they chose to do with that truth. Alongside survivor narratives and clothing, these installations include the institutional record: documentary evidence, police body-cam footage, forensic interview recordings, security camera footage, and, in some cases, material perpetrators themselves created. They also trace the blast radius of uninvestigated crimes: the additional victims created when earlier warnings were dismissed, earlier reports were minimized, and earlier evidence was set aside.

Across the institutions represented in this exhibit, authority too often became a grooming environment: it extended access, managed credibility, and protected power where it should have protected vulnerable people. When survivors do speak, the response is so often already scripted. The burden is shifted back onto the victim through a familiar set of accusatory questions: Why didn't you leave? Why didn't you just tell someone? What were you wearing? Had you been drinking? These are not neutral questions. They are thinly veiled accusations. They redirect responsibility away from the perpetrator and toward the victim. They are part of the same architecture that normalizes violence, dismantles credibility, and makes institutional indifference appear procedural, reasonable, and inevitable.

Storytelling here is not ornamental. It is testimony, witnessing, and moral repair. This exhibit does not ask for sentimentality. It asks you to look carefully, and long enough to see the pattern. It asks you to consider not only the acts themselves, but the infrastructure that makes those acts repeatable: the grooming, the excuses, the laundering of authority, the victim-blaming, the disbelief, the indifference, and the refusal to intervene. Silencing is itself a form of violence. And so I write - and build - so that silencing can be interrupted.

It is also true that this violence does not belong here. And you are among the people with the authority to intervene. You have the power to believe survivors. To protect children. To interrupt escalation before it becomes catastrophic. To ask - and to answer honestly - what evidence would have been enough? I can tell you this: sometimes that change begins with just a single story. I wrote the poem "What I Was Wearing" for me. To try to make sense of what had happened to me. Taken together, our stories became exhibits. The exhibits then became a record. And the record - if we are willing to read it - can become the thing that finally changes what happens next.

What I Was Wearing

was this:

from the top
a white t-shirt
cotton
short-sleeved
and round at the neck

this was tucked into
a jean skirt (also cotton)
ending just above the knees
and belted at the top

underneath all this
was a white cotton bra
and white underpants
(though probably not a set)

on my feet
white tennis shoes
the kind one plays tennis in

and then finally
silver earrings,
and lip gloss.

this is what i was wearing
that day
that night
that fourth of july
in 1987.

you may be wondering
why this matters
or even how i remember
every item
in such detail

you see
i have been asked
this question
many times

it has been called
to my mind
many times

this question
this answer
these details.

but my answer
much awaited
much anticipated
seems flat somehow

given the rest of the details
of that night
during which
at some point
i was raped.

and i wonder
what answer
what details
would give comfort
could give comfort
to you
my questioners

seeking comfort
where there is alas
no comfort
to be found.

if only it were so simple
if only we could end rape
by simply changing clothes.

i remember also
what he was wearing
that night

even though
it's true
that no one
has ever asked.

About the WWYW Exhibits

The “What Were You Wearing?” art installations and exhibits trace back to Mary Simmerling’s 2005 poem, “What I Was Wearing,” written after she was sexually assaulted as a teenager and repeatedly asked one of the most familiar victim-blaming questions: *Well, what were you wearing?* Her answer was profoundly ordinary - a white t-shirt and a jean skirt. That was part of the point. The poem confronted the thinly veiled accusation hidden inside that question and the wider false narrative that tries to locate the cause of assault in the victim rather than in the perpetrator and in the systems that too often protect him.

As the poem was shared, it resonated with other survivors because they recognized their own experiences in its language. One survivor's story became part of a shared vocabulary through which others could speak back to shame, disbelief, and erasure. It also spoke to advocates, first responders, and those who had already begun to recognize the systemic failures victims too often face. The poem made visible something many people already knew but had not yet seen named clearly: the question was never really about clothing. It was about blame, credibility, and the displacement of responsibility.

From its humble beginnings in 2013, when Jen Brockman and Dr. Mary Wyandt-Hiebert first transformed the poem into a physical installation at the University of Arkansas, “What Were You Wearing?” grew into a global survivor-centred movement rooted in testimony, witnessing, and resistance. The original installation premiered in April 2014. Since then, installations have been recorded across all 50 U.S. states and on six continents. What began as a direct challenge to the myth that clothing causes or provokes sexual assault has become an international practice of survivor-centred storytelling that foregrounds survivors' stories as truth and returns responsibility for these crimes where it belongs: to perpetrators, and to the systems that too often enable or conceal them.

The expanded 2026 installations build on that foundation while widening the aperture. They ask not only what survivors were wearing, but what happened after they spoke, reported, asked for protection, pleaded for intervention, or simply asked to be believed. By pairing survivors' words with representative clothing, documentary records, statistics, and audio and video evidence, the exhibits trace how victim-blaming, disbelief, and institutional indifference

facilitate and perpetuate gender-based crimes. In that sense, the 2026 exhibitions do not depart from the original installations; they follow the original question to its inevitable and often devastating consequences.

Each installation in the expanded series is intentionally multi-modal and immersive. Large black storyboards with individual lighting pair survivor testimony with clothing, objects, records, and contextual data. Audio and video excerpts document patterns of institutional failure, including police body-cam footage, forensic interview recordings, security-camera footage, and, in some cases, photographs or recordings perpetrators themselves created. The work also traces the “blast radius” of uninvestigated crimes - the additional victims created when earlier reports were ignored, earlier warnings were minimized, and earlier evidence was set aside. The exhibit environment is intentionally quiet. Lighting is low. Viewers are invited to sit, reflect, and take in the materials at their own pace.

The expanded exhibitions are co-produced by Write Where We Belong and The Wrong Questions Project, a survivor-led educational intervention that examines how victim-blaming questions protect perpetrators and enable violence. Write Where We Belong is an artists' ecosystem for change, created from the belief that each of us is born with creative genius and that the creative self has the power to heal - not only the self, but the world we live in. It is a multifaceted Canadian literary and arts organization focused on using writing and art as tools for social justice. Across workshops, publishing, public art, and exhibitions, the work is grounded in a simple but demanding premise: healing requires truth. We do not break free by sanitizing what has happened to us, or by smoothing violence into something more palatable for the comfort of others. We write and create on the axis of trauma, grief, and repair.

ABOUT THE 2026 EXHIBITION MODEL

The 2026 edition of “What Were You Wearing?” is the most expansive iteration of the work to date. It moves beyond what survivors wore to document what institutions heard - and what they chose to do with that truth. Alongside clothing displayed on illuminated black storyboards with survivor narratives and statistical data, and anchored in some venues by Edward Adkins' original composition "What Were You Wearing" - winner of the 2022 BBC Young Composer's Award - the installation introduces the institutional record: police body-cam footage, forensic interview recordings, security-camera footage, and documentation perpetrators themselves created.

It examines cases where victims were not only disbelieved but threatened, detained, fined, or arrested. It traces the blast radius of uninvestigated crimes - the additional victims created when earlier warnings were dismissed and evidence was set aside. It honours both survivors who came forward in their own words and those who did not survive, including women and girls whose names the public knows and women and girls whose names should have been protected, remembered, and acted upon far sooner.

In this expanded series, the installations include:

- Large black storyboards featuring survivors' words, statistical data, and individual lighting.
- Visual representations of the clothing survivors were wearing and/or objects perpetrators used or brought with them to facilitate their crimes.
- Audio and video excerpts documenting patterns of institutional failure, including police body-cam footage, recordings of police interviews, personal security-camera footage, and photographs and video perpetrators created to record their crimes.
- Survivor testimony in their own words about being dismissed, disbelieved, or blamed by the systems meant to protect them.
- Representations of the “blast radius” of uninvestigated crimes, including earlier reports that were ignored or dismissed and the additional victims who followed.

Excerpt from Simone Biles's testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee on September 15, 2021, on the FBI's handling of the Larry Nassar investigation:

"To be clear, I blame Larry Nassar, and I also blame an entire system that enabled and perpetrated his abuse."

SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH
SIMONE BILES TESTIFY



NASSAR SENTENCING

The breadth and ripple of the defendant's abuse and destruction is nearly infinite....it centers in the Lansing and MSU communities, spans the State of Michigan, and reaches club and elite training gyms, college athletics, and even the US and international Olympic communities. It's not even limited to gymnastics, as athletes from over a dozen different sports have reported abuse. His practiced and perfected abuse spanned over 25 years and included countless victims, beginning before he was a doctor, one who traveled the world seeking gold.

But we now know his access to children and young woman and his abuse did not end until an investigative news report and one brave woman came public to stop him.

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF ATTORNEY GENERAL



DANA NESSEL
ATTORNEY GENERAL

September 12, 2024

Report on Michigan State University/Larry Nassar Document Review and Investigation

Introduction

This report summarizes our findings following the release and review of documents that Michigan State University had, for years, withheld from our investigation into its handling of Larry Nassar and his abuse. The MSU Board of Trustees' (Board) decision to finally release the documents was a long-awaited step in the direction of transparency. Our review of those documents, however, has left us wondering why that step was not taken several years ago, and has provided us with no new basis on which to continue our investigation.

What was I wearing?
Footed pajamas
Where was I?
At home

In my step-father's lap—
Well, did I lead him on?

I was eight
(just a little blossom
hadn't opened yet).

- Sarah Kerr



Mothers' boyfriends and non-biological fathers are disproportionately represented in child abuse statistics, and their presence in the home significantly raises the risk of sexual abuse for young girls in the home.



"The scout master came back from his truck empty-handed and shook his head. He said he forgot to pack a sleeping bag for me, but I shouldn't worry— there was enough room for both of us in his."

- Caleb

70% of child sexual offenders have between 1 and 9 victims, while 20% have 10 to 40 victims. A significant number of child sexual abuse cases go unreported, and many offenders may not face legal consequences. Studies have found that child molesters have a sexual recidivism rate of approximately 13% over a 5-year period, 24% over 15 years, and 32% over 25 years.



Keira Kagan, May 18, 2015–February 8, 2020

Keira Kagan, age four, was murdered on February 8, 2020, by her father in a predictable and preventable act of gender-based violence and coercive control.

Her father had unsupervised, court-mandated access, despite a documented history of violence, coercive control, and repeated warnings from her mother and multiple system actors.

The case involved at least 10 judges and more than 50 court orders.

The court acknowledged that the father had an "unfortunate propensity to lie" and demonstrated aggressive and coercive behaviour. Yet domestic violence was explicitly dismissed as "not relevant to parenting" by the judge responsible for making the child custody decision in this case.

Child protection authorities identified serious concerns, including escalating behavior and risk of harm. A worker noted the father was displaying signs consistent with someone who might harm his child. The court was considering reducing or supervising access.

The visit proceeded anyway.

A subsequent review found that Keira had been exposed to multiple known lethality risk factors and that her death was "extremely consistent" with patterns of murder-suicide involving fathers and children.

The record is clear: The child's voice was "notably absent.... a child seen by numerous advocates, yet unheard."

Her protection needs "did not appear to be paramount."

No meaningful safety planning was implemented. Supervised access was not pursued. And then:

"It was a Friday... and all that could wait until Monday. By Monday, it was too late."

Keira Kagan was known to the systems charged with her protection. They failed her.

**NO MORE EXCUSES.
NO MORE INDIFFERENCE.
NO MORE FAILURES.
NO MORE DEAD GIRLS.**

**SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH KEIRA'S MOTHER
JENNIFER AND STEP-FATHER TALK ABOUT KEIRA**





Although Denise was still released, police went on national news within hours of her release to say that it was all made up. Denise was forced to hire a defense attorney and spent two days being questioned by the police and FBI. She underwent a SART exam that law enforcement never tested.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH
DENISE'S INTERVIEW WITH POLICE



Although Denise explained how the home invasion occurred with waking to flashing white lights, red laser dots scanning their bodies presumably coming from guns, not knowing exactly how many people were present, being forced to lie Aaron up, then herself being fed up, sensory deprivation from the blindfold, headphones and sedatives, threatening their partner with physical harm and death if they act out, etc., both the police and FBI continued to ask accusatory questions like, "Did you fight back? Did you scream? Did you try to escape?" At another point Denise is asked, "Did you ask them to let you go?" All of which made Denise feel like no matter what she did or how she acted, it was wrong. At the end of the two days of questioning, the lead FBI agent tells Denise's attorney that he is 99% sure Denise is lying and that her attorney should watch the movie *Gone Girl*—it would explain a lot.

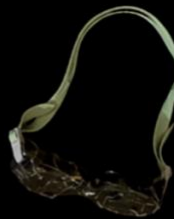
SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH
DENISE'S INTERVIEW WITH POLICE



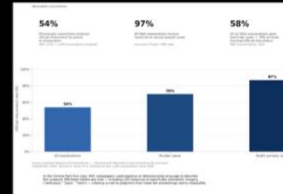
After the Vallejo press conference and media reports calling Denise "Gone Girl," while Denise was being questioned at the station, emails came in to take credit for the kidnapping. Multiple emails came in over the next several days, including a 19-page manifesto detailing a car theft ring and how this group led into kidnapping and ransom. Extensive details of the kidnapping were included to corroborate Aaron and Denise's account along with multiple pictures, including one of the bedrooms where Denise was held captive, making notes that her employees were on top of the dresser. Details and images were also included about prior break-ins in the neighborhood that Denise and Aaron couldn't have possibly known. In one message, the kidnappers even threaten they will be "the agent of harm" if police do not admit they were wrong. Yet, for the next several months Denise and Aaron continue to be threatened with prosecution, and no one is looking into the actual kidnappers.



June 5th, 2015, in Dublin, California, which is about an hour southwest of Vallejo, CA, a husband and wife are attacked in the middle of the night with their adult daughter in the next room. The husband is able to fight the assailant off, leaving behind a cell phone that Alameda Sheriffs are able to link to a 38-year-old man, Matthew Muller. They arrest him days later in his family's South Lake Tahoe home. In the home was overwhelming evidence that made new Detective Misty Carasu suspect more had happened. In a white Mustang not far from the home, a duffel bag was found in the trunk with tactical gear, zip ties, a tarp, and duct taped swim goggles with a blonde hair attached. The victims in the Dublin case all had dark hair so Misty knew there was another victim out there. She eventually located the Mustang's owner, and this is where she learned about Denise and Aaron's cases, and that Denise had long blonde hair. It wasn't until July 13th that an FBI affidavit for the arrest of Muller was unsealed, and Denise and Aaron's were proven not only "not guilty," but "innocent."



WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS



UNTESTED RAPE KITS



WHAT TESTING REVEALED



In March 2015, Denise Huskins was staying the night at her then boyfriend Aaron Quinn's house in Vallejo, California. They were awakened to a strange man's voice saying, "Wake up. This is a robbery. Stay calm. We are not here to hurt you." Denise and Aaron were bound, blindfolded with duct-taped swim goggles, threatened, forced to take sedatives and given headphones with pre-recorded messages of instructions. Ultimately, Denise was taken in the trunk of a car, kidnapped for two days and raped twice while the assailant recorded the assaults. Aaron was imprisoned in his home with a camera installed to monitor him and a ransom of \$17,000 was demanded for Denise's release. Aaron realized the camera wasn't working properly, so he called the police for help. Police were accusatory from the beginning, stripping Aaron down naked to photograph him, then placing him in cartoonish striped prison clothes. Aaron endured 18 hours of relentless interrogations and psychological torture where police and the FBI put all of their focus on trying to get Aaron to confess to Denise's murder.

From: AARON >
To: Aaron >
Re: March 23, 2015 at 12:46 PM
Inbox

We will proceed with this address.

Denise is well. We have a short recorded message so stating that I will format and send at some point.

Are you able to obtain a cash advance from your bank card? If so, cash in the amount of \$5000 from one account and cash in the amount of \$5000 from the other account would settle this matter. For your own safety, we do not wish to trigger the \$10000 reporting limit or other structured transactions regulations. You would be welcome to transfer what money you like back to the credit card.

The drop would happen tomorrow night or early Wednesday morning, with release to follow quickly provided all instructions are followed.

From: AARON >
To: Aaron >
Re: March 23, 2015 at 7:46 PM
Inbox

No Subject

We will call you at about 9am on your mobile phone. You liaison will be the same contact as during the acquisition phase. Please verify that you have received this message.

From: AARON >
To: Aaron >
Re: March 23, 2015 at 8:13 PM
Inbox

We are waiting on your acknowledgment



As the interrogation begins to escalate, local police Detective Mustard tells Aaron that no one has reached out for a ransom demand. Yet here are some of the many messages that were sent to Aaron that day by the kidnappers. Aaron was at the police station by ~2:30pm. Messages continued to come in, including one where it stated the kidnappers would try to call by 9pm and the last one asking for a reply. At 8:35pm Mustard tells Aaron, "She's dead...I've accepted that. She's dead...I'm not looking for a live Denise. I'm looking for a dead Denise..." It was discovered the next day that the authorities placed Aaron's phone on airplane mode, missing two calls at 8:31pm and 8:33pm from the kidnappers that could later be traced to the exact location of where Denise was held captive. If they followed the evidence, they would have rescued Denise and spared her from the second rape.

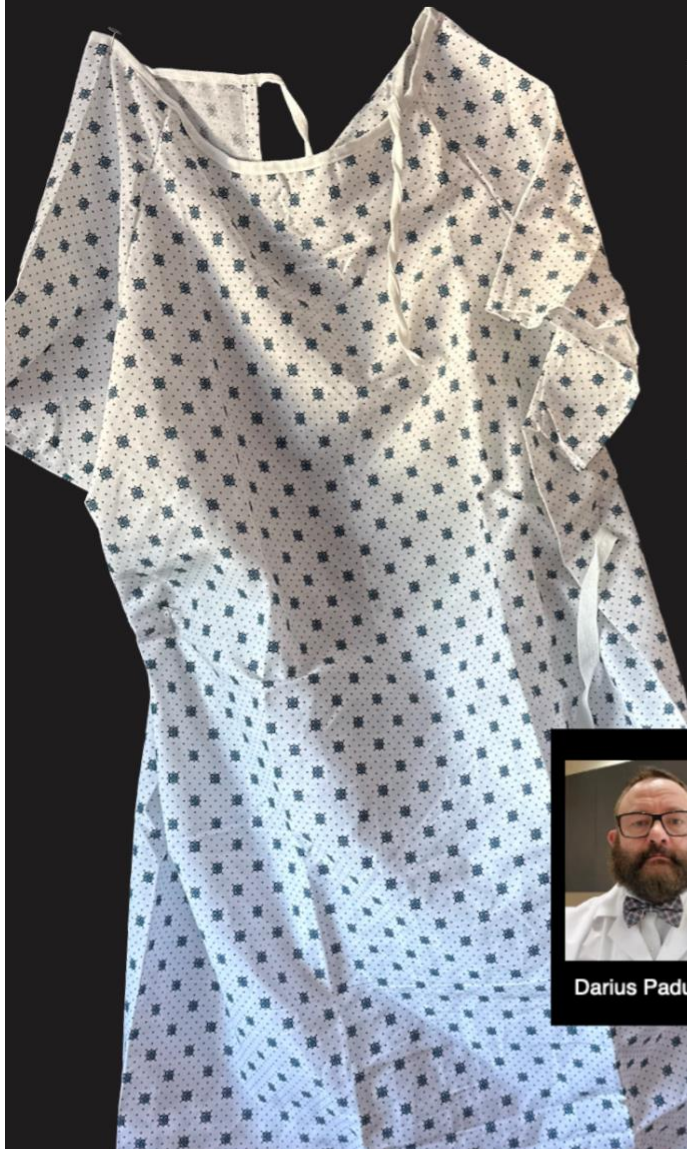
SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH AARON'S
MARCH 23, 2015 POLICE INTERVIEW



Aaron is then subjected to a polygraph by an FBI agent around 2am. Aaron had not had food, very little water and had been at the police station for over 12 hours already. His family had been there at night, but law enforcement would not let him see or talk to family. Aaron knew polygraphs are unreliable and inadmissible in court, but he was afraid he would seem guilty if he didn't take it. After all, he was telling the truth. After the polygraph is complete, the FBI agent unlocks him, ties to him saying he failed miserably, and berates Aaron for 40 minutes straight, hardly letting Aaron speak. Both this agent and the first Vallejo detective are performing the Reid technique, which is one of the most widely used training for interrogations in law enforcement. By nature, it is guilt presumptive. When they believe a suspect is lying, they go through a 5-step process using psychological pressure and manipulation solely focused on getting a confession. These steps include directly telling the suspect they believe he is lying, develop a "theme" by offering psychological justifications or excuses and minimizing the crime to encourage a confession ("So you made a mistake, big deal"), cutting off any denial attempted by the suspect ("I don't want you to stay a week...not me what happened but don't start with these guys coming in..."), maintaining the suspects attention by providing an isolating environment (cold, windowless room, in prison clothes, kept from loved ones and being physically close and/or touching the suspect, providing alternate questions ("Either it was an accident, or you are a cold, calculated monster," "Either you come clean now, or you will be viewed as a monster,"), All of this is done over and over until the suspect confesses.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH
AARON'S INTERVIEW





By the time the Heaps case became fully visible, the scale of Heaps's abuse was staggering. Hundreds of former patients came forward, describing assaults that occurred during routine medical visits over the course of decades.

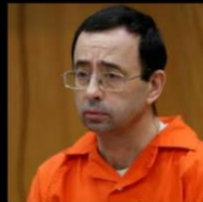
In 2022, Julie Wallach, a former patient of Heaps, recounted her long journey to being believed and holding Heaps and UCLA accountable:

"Twenty-four years ago, in 1998, I was referred to Dr. James Heaps at UCLA. At that time, Dr. Heaps sexually abused and assaulted me. I filed a complaint against him with the California Medical Board. I chased down the powers that be at UCLA, who oversaw Dr. Heaps. Nothing was done."

UCLA eventually agreed to settlements totaling nearly \$700 million with survivors of Heaps's abuse, one of the largest university settlements involving physician misconduct in the United States.



Darius Paduch



Larry Nassar



James Heaps



Robert Hadden

104

Combined years
of documented abuse

3,200+

Known survivors
across four cases

~\$3B

In institutional
payouts & settlements

4

Elite Institutions.
One playbook.

PHYSICIAN	FIRST REPORT & PERIOD	PRIMARY INSTITUTIONS	VICTIMS IDENTIFIED	SETTLEMENTS
Robert Hadden	First report: 1994 25 years (1987–2012)	Columbia University Irving Medical Center & NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital (1987–2012)	1,000+ survivors settled; ~6,500 notified	> \$1 Billion
Larry Nassar	First report: 1997 24 years (1992–2016)	Michigan State University (1997–2016); USA Gymnastics (1986–2015)	500+ identified; 265 impact statements	> \$1.018 Billion
James Heaps	First report: 1998 35 years (1983–2018)	UCLA Medical Center & Student Health Center (1983–2018)	Hundreds of plaintiffs; 6,600+ class-action eligible	~\$700 Million
Darius Paduch	First report: 2006 20 years (2003–2023)	Weill Cornell Medicine & NewYork-Presbyterian (2003–2019); Northwell Health (2019–2023)	800+ lawsuits filed; estimated thousands	Pending (Active litigation)

Different institutions. Different specialties. Different decades. The same architecture: deference, disbelief, and managed records. 104 combined years of abuse operating in plain sight.



By the time the Hagan case became fully public, the world of Pagan's abuse was largely forgotten. Instead of being publicly scrutinized, including scrutiny for sexualizing minors, sexual abuse and the role of Pagan and CFA in its commission.

It was, in fact, a case of Pagan's abuse that was largely forgotten. Instead of being publicly scrutinized, including scrutiny for sexualizing minors, sexual abuse and the role of Pagan and CFA in its commission.

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Perpetrator	First Name & Last Name	Perpetrator's Address	Perpetrator's Phone	Perpetrator's Email
Robert Hagan	Robert Hagan (1968-1970) (1970-1972)	10000 S. 10th St. (1968-1970) (1970-1972)	10000 S. 10th St. (1968-1970) (1970-1972)	10000 S. 10th St. (1968-1970) (1970-1972)
Larry Hester	Larry Hester (1968-1970) (1970-1972)	10000 S. 10th St. (1968-1970) (1970-1972)	10000 S. 10th St. (1968-1970) (1970-1972)	10000 S. 10th St. (1968-1970) (1970-1972)
James Hagan	James Hagan (1968-1970) (1970-1972)	10000 S. 10th St. (1968-1970) (1970-1972)	10000 S. 10th St. (1968-1970) (1970-1972)	10000 S. 10th St. (1968-1970) (1970-1972)
Robert Hagan	Robert Hagan (1968-1970) (1970-1972)	10000 S. 10th St. (1968-1970) (1970-1972)	10000 S. 10th St. (1968-1970) (1970-1972)	10000 S. 10th St. (1968-1970) (1970-1972)



CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

GRACE MCGHEE

For her courage in sharing her story and for her role in helping others understand the importance of consent and boundaries.

April 15, 2022

"The school police officer told me he liked how I decorated my braces for the holidays. I was a freshman. He knew my parents. He knew I had been assaulted. He told us he had been too. He promised to protect me. Instead, he violated me."

- Grace

The vast majority of adolescent sexual abuse cases begin with seemingly harmless interactions that escalate to inappropriate behavior. Predatory adults often build trust, isolate victims, and gradually introduce boundary-crossing dialogue or physical contact disguised as mentorship or friendship. Teens aged 14 to 17 are especially vulnerable in professional and artistic settings.



These items were found in the home of a predator who was involved in the sexual abuse of a minor. The items are being displayed as evidence of the predator's actions.




It is a common theme in the lives of many children that they are being groomed by adults. This is often done through the use of toys and other items that are familiar to the child. The predator uses these items to build trust and isolate the child from their family and friends.



Other items found in the home of the predator include a green and pink skirt, a string of beads, and a small toy figure. These items are being displayed as evidence of the predator's actions.



"He would tell me I was too pretty to be a boy."

- Seth Gehle



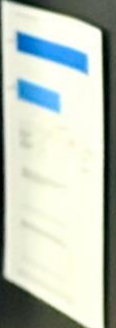
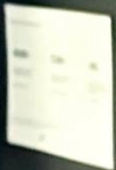
~1 in 6 boys are sexually abused before 18, often through predatory grooming, where perpetrators manipulate trust. They may target at-risk homes, use gifts, money, or gaming platforms, and even build trust with families to facilitate abuse.



"Your parents don't understand you. But I do. Don't worry, you can stay here with me. We have a special friendship, don't we?"

- Ari

70% of childhood sexual assault survivors delay disclosure for over a decade, with one-third never disclosing. Their silence is due to feelings of shame, fear of disbelief, fear of repercussions, confusion about what occurred, and fear of familial disruption.



There is a lot of information on this page, and it is important to read it carefully. The information is organized into sections, and each section contains a different type of information. The first section is titled 'Introduction' and contains a brief overview of the project. The second section is titled 'Methods' and describes the procedures used to collect and analyze the data. The third section is titled 'Results' and presents the findings of the study. The fourth section is titled 'Discussion' and discusses the implications of the results. The fifth section is titled 'Conclusion' and summarizes the main points of the study.



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*There's somebody after me.
They're trying to kill me.*

-Shannan Gilbert 911 call

The acute physiological response to inescapable terror—including dissociation, hypervigilance, and erratic movement—is frequently miscategorized by authorities as drug intoxication or a psychotic break. This systemic bias dismisses the victim's reality and effectively protects perpetrators.



*Get off of me. No one's helping me. Stay ... away from me.
No, I just wanna see my mom. I just wanna go home.*

- 13-year-old Emily Pike's words to police as recorded on police bodycam footage

Severe trauma often triggers fight. When a traumatized child runs from an isolated or restrictive group home in search of safety or family, the system treats that survival response as a "status offence." Because child welfare systems are under-resourced and rely heavily on law enforcement to locate missing youth, a child in acute crisis is often met not by a trauma specialist, but by an armed police officer—and is routinely handcuffed when taken into custody.

Wingaská Wááłáá "Sweetgrass Lodge"

I am a woman, a warrior, a photographer, an advocate and a member of the Chippewa-Cree Tribe from Rocky Boy, Montana. A carrier of stories that live between grief and hope. Through visual photography, I bring awareness to the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People — a truth that echoes through generations of our families and our lands.

Each photograph I create is a prayer, a memory, and a demand for justice. It is how I turn historical trauma into historical resiliency. Through the lens, I feel the breath of my ancestors and the strength of my daughters. I see myself in the faces of those who are missing and in the eyes of those who still search.

Photography has a way of touching the spirit before the mind can explain it. It creates a visceral reaction — a reminder that these are not statistics, but loved ones. The families are the true experts of this issue. They held the wisdom, the pain, and the courage that guide this work. I am simply here to bear witness.

My greatest wish is that one day, this work will no longer be needed — that the crisis will fade, but healing will take root, and that all people will be looked for the same. Until that day comes, I will continue. I will not stop.

Learn more at www.mmiwproject.org

Full name: Wingaská Wááłáá "Sweetgrass Lodge"

Government name: Jen Murphy

Justice like a River For MLK

I stand on Indigenous land in Montana, where the mountains remember every promise broken
and every prayer still rising.

Today, I honor you, not only for your dream, but for your courage to love in a world that taught us to harden.

You spoke of justice like a river,
and I know that river. It runs through our Nations, through stolen children and silenced women, through survival that refuses to be erased.

As an Indigenous woman, I recognize your truth: that hate is taught and so is healing.
That love is not soft, it is brave, disciplined, and demanding.

They try to divide us, race against race, pain against pain,
story against story. But our struggles are braided, much like Sweetgrass and our
futures must be too.

You believed love could bend the arc and I believe it still can. Love that listens. Love
that stands between harm and the vulnerable. Love that calls us back to one another
when fear tells us to turn away.

From these northern plains,
from Tribal Nations still standing,
I promise to add my voice to yours. We do not heal by separating. We do not rise by
forgetting each other.

We came together, not by denying difference, but by honoring it, walking side by side
toward justice that belongs to us all.

Love is still the answer. And because of you, the dream is still alive.

JMM

OUR VOICES WILL NOT BE SILENCED.
WE ARE STILL HERE.

#MMIW
#NOMORESTOLENSISTERS

TVERAA PHOTOGRAPHY

00000 LAMAR

Creator,
Bring our People
Home.
Protect the most
vulnerable.

#MMIP #MMIW
@mmiwproject.org

00000 LAMAR

A Steady Place

You meet people on the worst day of their lives; not the kind that comes with warning, not the kind that softens at the edges, but the kind that splits time into before and after.

You walk into rooms where silence is louder than screaming, where words sit heavy in throats, where trust has been broken.
by hands that should have never harmed. And still, you stay.

You learn to speak gently without speaking, to listen fully without turning away, to hold stories that were never yours to carry, but you carry them anyway.

You become a steady place in a world that suddenly isn't.

A voice that says, I believe you. A presence that says, You are not alone. A reminder, quiet but unswerving, that what was taken
does not define what remains.

But no one tells you how the stories linger, how they echo
in the spaces between your own life, how you gather pieces of grief you cannot set down at the end of a shift.

Still, you return. Because somewhere in the middle of the unbearable, there is a moment; small, fragile, sacred, when a survivor breathes just a little easier, speaks just a little clearer, feels, maybe for the first time, a thread of power returning to their hands.

And you see it.

That quiet reckoning. That flower of self. That beginning.
And it is enough to remind you
why you do this.

You are not the story.
You are not the harm.
You are the steady light in a place that tried to go dark.

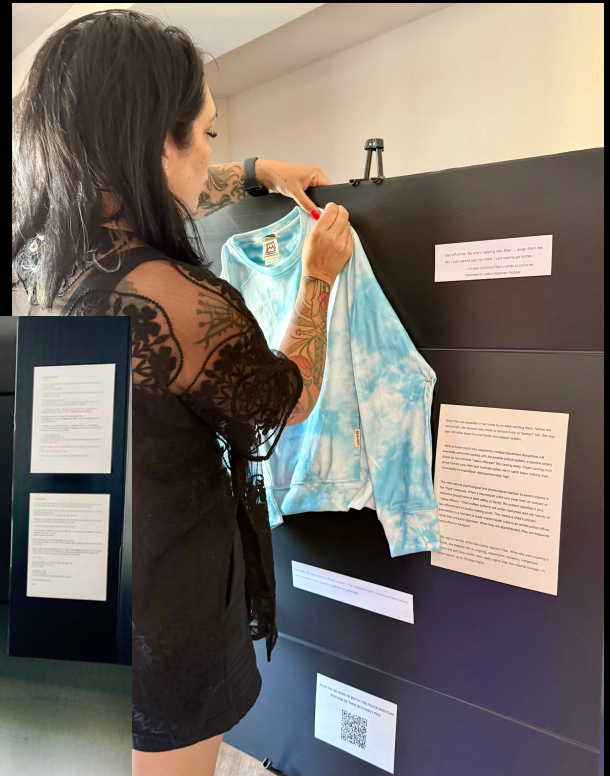
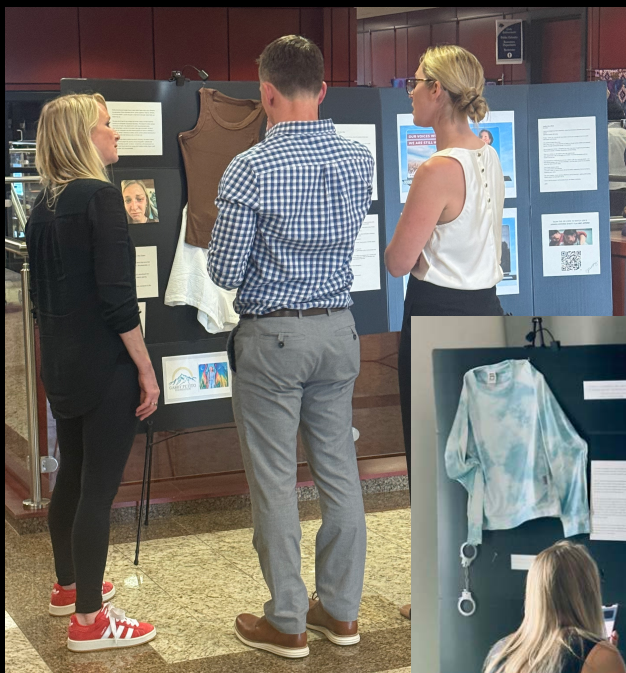
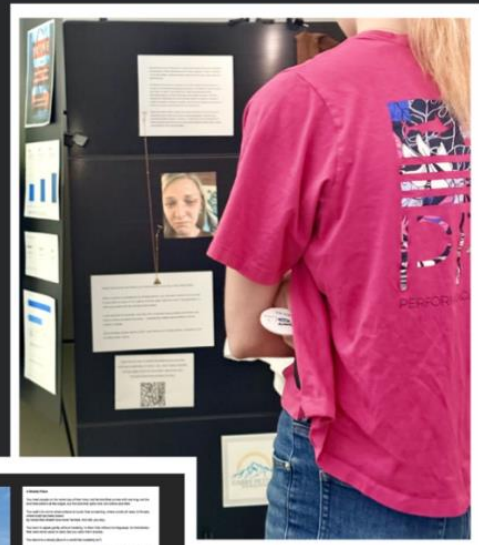
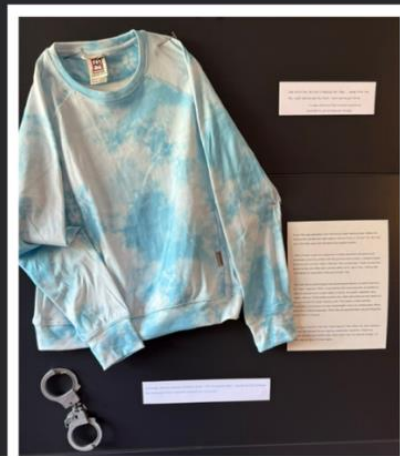
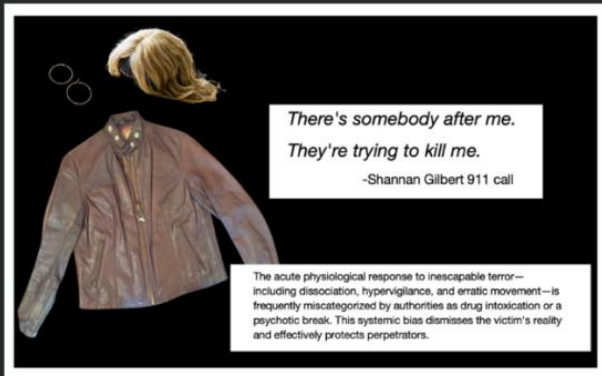
You are the ones who stay.

JMM

SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH JEN'S
AWARD-WINNING SHORT FILM **NOT AFRAID**



REMEMBERING THOSE WHO DID NOT SURVIVE AND THOSE WHO REMAIN MISSING



The Record on Children

Grooming, Institutional Failure, and the Architecture of Child Sexual Abuse

WHAT WERE YOU WEARING? ♦ MICHIGAN EXHIBIT ♦ 2026

A Co-Production of Write Where We Belong & The Wrong Questions Project
writewherewebelong.ca · thewrongquestionsproject.org

This exhibit is anchored in Michigan because Michigan holds one of the clearest contemporary records of how child sexual abuse becomes possible: an osteopathic physician at Michigan State University and USA Gymnastics abused at least 265 girls and young women under the guise of medical treatment, while the institutions around him — coaches, athletic directors, university leadership, the FBI — saw warnings, heard reports, and chose other priorities. The Nassar case is not an outlier. It is an exemplar. What follows is the larger pattern: who harms children, where, through what institutions, and what made it repeatable.

THE BASELINE — CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE UNITED STATES

1 in 4

girls and 1 in 20 boys
experience child sexual
abuse before age 18

CDC FAST FACTS

~90%

of child sexual abuse is
committed by someone
known and trusted by
the child or family

CDC / DOJ BJS

93%

of juvenile sexual abuse
victims knew the
perpetrator — only 7%
were strangers

DOJ BJS

1,773

U.S. children died from
abuse and neglect in
2024 — most under age
3

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S
ALLIANCE

The data on child sexual abuse perpetrators is unambiguous and has been for decades. About 88–90% of perpetrators are men. The largest single category is family members — about 34% of cases. Acquaintances account for roughly 59%. Stranger abuse is rare: 7%. Within institutional environments, the perpetrators chosen for trust are not opportunistic strangers but people the child and family already knew, deferred to, or admired. The grooming is not incidental to the abuse. The grooming is part of the abuse. It is the mechanism by which access is achieved, secrecy is maintained, and the child is positioned to doubt their own perception of what is happening.

“Perpetrators report that they look for passive, quiet, troubled, lonely children from single-parent or broken families. They establish a trusting relationship before abusing them — not infrequently, this extends to establishing a trusting relationship with the victim’s family as well.”

— Penn Children’s Advocacy Center / Darkness to Light

Source: CDC About Child Sexual Abuse Fast Facts (2024) · DOJ Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement* · National Children’s Alliance 2024 National Statistics · RAINN Statistics: Children & Teens · Penn CAC / Darkness to Light

THE FAMILY HOME — WHERE MOST CHILD HOMICIDE HAPPENS

76%

of substantiated child abuse victims were harmed by a parent or legal guardian (2024)

NATIONAL CHILDREN’S ALLIANCE
2024

25%

of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by a parent or parent substitute; another 25% by other relatives

SHAKESHAFT / USCCB REVIEW

~6x

increased fatal-injury risk for young children when a non-biological cohabiting man (mother’s boyfriend or stepfather) lives in the home

STIFFMAN ET AL., *PEDIATRICS* 2002
/ DALY & WILSON

The single largest category of child homicide perpetrators in the United States is fathers, stepfathers, and the boyfriends of children’s mothers. Among 132 cases analyzed in a foundational *Pediatrics* study of inflicted-injury child deaths, 71% of perpetrators were male. 35% were the child’s biological father. 24% were the boyfriend of the child’s mother. Stepfathers and other unrelated cohabiting men appeared at sharply elevated rates as a share of fatal abuse perpetrators relative to their share of the household population. CDC and ACF data continue to show that boys 11 to 17 are increasingly killed by firearms in family settings, while children under 10 are most often killed by blunt force trauma. The home is not a neutral location in this data. It is the most common one.

RUNAWAYS & HOMELESS YOUTH — THE PIPELINE FROM HOME TO TRAFFICKING

29,000+

missing child cases reported to NCMEC in 2024 — 27,000 classified as endangered runaways

NCMEC 2024

1 in 7

missing children reported to NCMEC in 2024 were likely victims of sex trafficking

NCMEC 2024 / DOT 2024

11-14

average age of children targeted by sex traffickers; some as young as 9

NCMEC / NIH STATPEARLS

Most children who run do so from the same homes the prior section describes — the homes where the abuse, the unsafe adult, or the catastrophic neglect already lives. The misconception that runaways are willful, low-priority cases is itself part of the architecture: it explains why some children who go missing are framed as having chosen risk, while others are framed as victims. Black children disproportionately receive the runaway label rather than the missing label, with documented downstream effects on media coverage, law enforcement urgency, and recovery resources. Within 48 hours of going missing, roughly one-third of runaway children are approached by a trafficker.

Source: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children 2024 & 2025 Reports · U.S. Department of Transportation *Human Trafficking* 101 · Stiffman et al., *Pediatrics* 2002 · National Child Identification Program · NCANDS / ASPE

AUTHORITY AS A GROOMING ENVIRONMENT — SEVEN INSTITUTIONAL CASES

Across the institutions represented on these boards, authority itself became the grooming environment. Each of the seven cases below extended access, managed credibility, and protected the perpetrator’s position when the institution should have protected the children in its care. The names differ. The dates differ. The pattern does not.

MEDICINE · SPORT

Larry Nassar

Osteopathic physician at Michigan State University (1997–2016) and USA Gymnastics team doctor. Convicted of sexually abusing at least **265** girls and women — many of them children — under the guise of medical treatment. The FBI was notified in July 2015 and did not act for 14 months; an estimated **70 to 120 additional victims** were abused in that gap. Settlements: MSU \$500M, USAG/USOPC \$380M, DOJ \$138.7M.

MEDICINE · PEDIATRICS

Darius Paduch

New York urologist at Weill Cornell (17 years), New York-Presbyterian, and Northwell Health. Convicted May 2024 on 11 federal counts; sentenced to **life** November 2024. Specialized in male reproductive health — abuse occurred under the guise of clinical exam. **300+ civil suits** allege the hospitals received complaints for years and did not act.

FAITH

Catholic Clergy Abuse

The 2004 John Jay Report documented **4,392 priests** credibly accused and **10,667 victims** from 1950 to 2002. **50.9%** of victims were aged 11–14; 81% were boys. Subsequent state attorney general investigations have continued to expand the documented record. Settlements have exceeded \$4 billion nationally.

SCOUTING

Boy Scouts of America

Internal “Perversion Files” documented **7,800+ leaders** over a 72-year period and **12,000+ alleged victims** from 1944 to 2016. After bankruptcy and the “lookback window” laws, **82,000+ survivors** filed claims — among the largest abuse settlements in U.S. history at \$2.46 billion.

THE TRUSTED ADULT NEXT DOOR

Armando “Mondo” Vasquez

Bluffton, Ohio. **Seth Gehle** was 10 years old when a charismatic 30-year-old neighbor began grooming him as an escape from an abusive home. Sexual abuse continued from age 10 to 16. Mondo was convicted in January 2011 with a 10-year plea deal and died in prison. Seth’s case is on a separate board in this exhibit.

SCHOOL · EDUCATION

Educator-Perpetrator Cases

Hofstra University researcher Charol Shakeshaft has estimated that roughly **10% of K-12 students** experience educator sexual misconduct at some point in their school careers. Educator cases are routinely under-reported because districts handle them administratively rather than refer them to law enforcement, allowing perpetrators to move from district to district.

LAW ENFORCEMENT · SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER

Gracelyn McGhee

Gracelyn was a high school freshman when the school police officer assigned to her building began grooming her. He knew her parents. He knew she had been previously assaulted. He told the family he had been assaulted himself, and used that disclosure to position himself as a uniquely safe protector. Then he assaulted her. In her own words, on her board in this exhibit: *“He promised to protect me. Instead, he violated me.”* The case combines every grooming mechanism named on this page — the institutional uniform that signals safety, the parental trust extended in advance, the false disclosure that reframes the predator as a fellow survivor, and the freshman-aged target the research consistently identifies as most vulnerable.

Source: DOJ Office of the Inspector General Nassar Investigation Report (July 2021) · USDOJ Press Releases (Paduch, 2024) · John Jay College, *The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States, 1950–2002* · Boy Scouts of America Bankruptcy Settlement (Delaware, 2022) · Lima News / The Journey Podcast (Gehle) · Shakeshaft, *Educator Sexual Misconduct* (US Dept. of Education, 2004) · Survivor testimony, exhibit board (McGhee)

WHY MICHIGAN, WHY THESE VOICES

This exhibit is built around the central question — *What evidence would have been enough?* — because in case after case, the evidence was already there. Reports were made. Patterns were noticed. Institutions were notified. The harm continued anyway. The boards on display include children whose abuse was facilitated by trusted adults — inside the family home, the locker room, the exam room, the scout troop, the school hallway, the family court — and adult survivors and family spokespeople whose cases belong on the same record because the line between the adult survivor and the child she once was is not where institutions like to draw it.

◆ FOUR BOARDS ON A CHILD-SAFETY RECORD ◆

Denise Huskins Quinn, DPT, and **Aaron Quinn, DPT**, 2026 Michigan keynote speakers. Denise was first sexually assaulted at age twelve, by a tertiary member of a family she had only just met on a camping trip. In her introduction to *Making Space for the Light*, she writes plainly: *“Everyone else trusted him, so I had no reason to fear or question him.”* That sentence is the architecture of every case on page three of this booklet. The adults who were supposed to evaluate the danger had already extended trust. The child inherited that trust, the way children always do. As an adult, Denise was abducted, held in captivity, and sexually assaulted in 2015 — and then accused by police of staging the entire crime. The case became *Victim F* and Netflix’s *American Nightmare*.

Jennifer Kagan-Viater, mother of **Keira Kagan** — Keira, aged four, was found dead alongside her father at the bottom of a cliff in Rattlesnake Point, Ontario, on February 9, 2020, while in her father’s care. Over a four-year custody dispute, **10 different judges** and **53 court orders** documented the father’s violence and dishonesty. Jennifer warned the court repeatedly. The Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee later found the deaths “extremely consistent with past reviewed cases of intimate partner violence,” and noted that the DVDRC’s 41-factor lethality screen marks any case with seven or more factors as both *predictable and preventable*. Jennifer’s advocacy produced **Keira’s Law**, which now requires Canadian judges hearing family court matters to be trained on intimate partner violence and coercive control.

Shannan Gilbert, 24 years old, whose 22-minute 911 call from Long Island in May 2010 (*“There’s somebody after me. They’re trying to kill me.”*) was treated as the ramblings of an intoxicated woman. Her remains were found in 2011. The search for her led police to discover the bodies of **ten** additional homicide victims along Ocean Parkway — what is now known as the Gilgo Beach killings. Shannan’s mother, **Mari Gilbert**, spent the rest of her life fighting to have Shannan’s case reopened as a homicide rather than an accidental drowning; an independent autopsy she commissioned suggested Shannan may have been strangled. Mari was killed in 2016. The case made law enforcement’s pattern of dismissing missing women — particularly women in sex work — a national subject.

Gabby Petito, daughter of co-curators Nichole and Jim Schmidt, killed in 2021. Body-cam footage from a Moab, Utah, traffic stop two weeks before her death showed visible injuries, distress, and clear indicators of intimate partner violence — indicators officers were trained to recognize and did not act on. Children in homes with this dynamic are watching the same indicators be missed.

These four cases sit alongside the children’s cases because the same architecture produced both. The gymnastics mat, the exam room, the church basement, the school hallway, the family court hearing, the bus station, the 911 call, the body-cam tape — they are not separate categories of victim. They are the same continuum of disbelief, and it works the same way regardless of whether the person on the receiving end is still a child.

THE QUESTION THIS EXHIBIT WAS BUILT TO ANSWER

What evidence would have been enough? In Michigan, the answer arrived in a 14-month FBI delay during which at least 70 more children were abused. In every other case on these boards, the evidence was also there. The grooming was visible. The reports were filed. The patterns were known. The response is the part this audience has the standing to change.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF IMPUNITY: THE SYSTEMIC NATURE OF THIS VIOLENCE

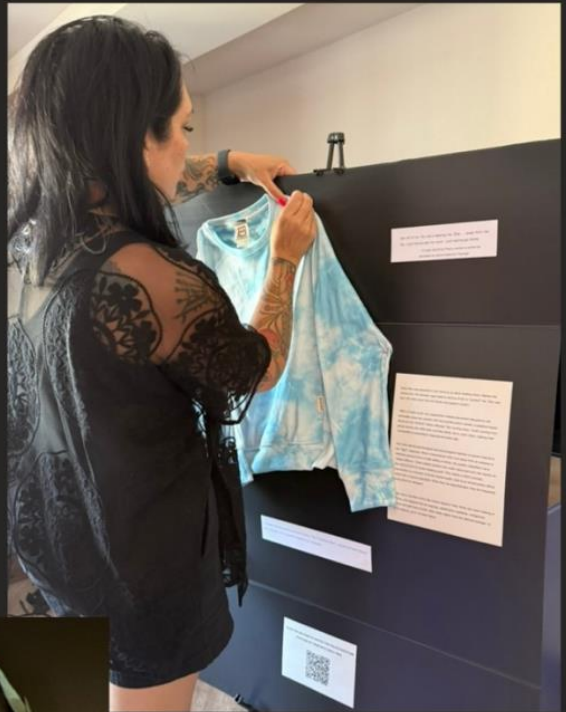
Grooming matters so much in this exhibit because it is not incidental; it is instead an *achievement*. Grooming is one of the primary mechanisms through which this violence is made possible. It is not only children who are groomed. Adults are groomed. Entire families are groomed. Communities are groomed. Institutions are groomed into extending trust, overlooking warning signs, and protecting the credibility of the perpetrator. This is how access is secured. This is how silence is maintained. The grooming is part of the violence.

The CDC states that at least one in four girls and one in 20 boys in the United States experience child sexual abuse, and that about 90% of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone known and trusted by the child or the child's family members. That is why boards involving scouting, sports, church, medicine, family systems, and police authority are so legible here. They are not outliers. They are exemplars of a structure we already know.

When survivors do speak, the response is so often already scripted. The burden is shifted back onto the victim through a familiar set of accusatory questions: Why didn't you leave? Why didn't you just tell someone? What were you wearing? Had you been drinking? These questions are not neutral. They are part of a wider pattern of credibility policing. They redirect responsibility away from the perpetrator and toward the victim. They function as a form of social and institutional laundering through which violence is softened, disbelief is rationalized, and indifference is made to appear inevitable.

Across the institutions represented in this exhibit - from churches to elite medical institutions inside universities, from elite sports organizations and national clubs for children to law enforcement - authority too often became a grooming environment: each extended access, managed credibility, and protected power when it should have protected vulnerable people. That is why these boards ask viewers to hold together the individual and the structural, the story and the pattern, the testimony and the record. The point is not only to witness harm after the fact, but to understand the architecture that allows it to keep happening and find ways to intervene and interrupt it. This will not be done through silence, but through voice and action.

CURATING THE EXHIBIT



ABOUT THE CURATOR AND CO-CURATORS

Mary Simmerling, Ph.D., Curator



Mary Simmerling is a philosopher, poet, curator, editor, and the founder of Write Where We Belong, a Canadian literary and arts organization and artists' ecosystem for change. She works at the intersection of philosophy, poetry, cultural criticism, and public art. Her writing and curatorial practice are grounded in a simple but demanding premise: justice is inseparable from voice. She is interested in the mechanisms by which violence is minimized, aestheticized, administratively absorbed, or laundered into

something socially acceptable. Through Write Where We Belong, she has built an ecosystem that integrates workshops, publishing, and public installations. Her 2005 poem “What I Was Wearing” is the inspiration for the global movement of “What Were You Wearing?” exhibits. Her recent books include *Making Space for the Light: Documenting the Violence that Shapes the Lives of Women and Girls* and *The Architecture of Impunity: A Forensic Audit of Modern Predation*.

Suzy Boylan, JD, Co-Curator



Suzy Boylan is a longtime Deputy County Attorney in Missoula who served as the first Lead Attorney of the Special Victims Unit formed after the U.S. Department of Justice's investigation into Missoula's handling of sexual assault. She spent her career handling gender-based violence and child abuse cases and training the criminal justice system on survivor-centred best practices. Suzy spent the

last five years of her career at the Missoula County Attorney's Office handling the caseload that included obtaining guardianship and conservatorship for indigent citizens without family members who could take on those roles.

Denise Huskins Quinn, DPT, and Aaron Quinn, DPT, Co-Curators



Denise Huskins Quinn and Aaron Quinn are survivors whose lived experience of being wrongly accused of staging a home invasion and Denise's abduction, captivity, and sexual assaults was later documented in the book *Victim F* and the Netflix series *American Nightmare*. Their case has become one of the clearest contemporary examples of how institutional disbelief and coercive

interrogation practices such as the Reid Method can deepen trauma and obstruct justice. They now work to educate law enforcement and other professionals on science-based, ethical interrogation practices.



Nichole Schmidt and Jim Schmidt, Co-Curators

Nichole and Jim Schmidt are the mother and stepfather of Gabby Petito, whose murder in 2021 exposed how police can miss or minimize the signs of intimate partner violence even when those signs are directly in front of them. Together, they co-founded the Gabby Petito

Foundation. Jim also trains first responders on domestic violence recognition and non-fatal strangulation. They are currently awaiting the Utah Supreme Court scheduling of the appeal in the case *Petito v. Moab City Police Department* in which the Moab City Police Department invoked immunity in the case.

Sweetgrass Lodge (Government Name: Jen Murphy), Co-Curator



Jen Murphy is a photographer, poet, Chaplain, and enrolled member of the Chippewa Cree Tribes. Through the MMIW Project, she uses visual art to bring national visibility to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People. Her work has been featured on NBC's Today Show and CBS's 48 Hours, and she is the Executive Producer of the short film *Not Afraid*, which received the Indigenous Film and Culture Award from the Windrider Film Showcase at Sundance. She is also the author of the book *More Like Her*.

Chris McGhee, Co-Curator

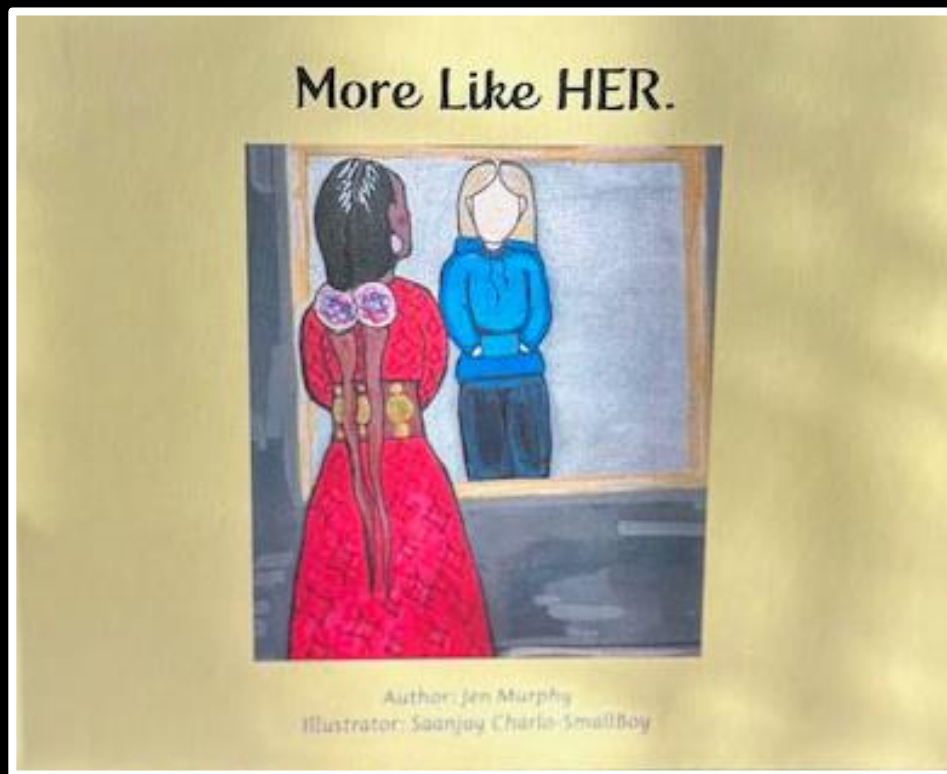
Chris McGhee is a father whose advocacy, following a police officer's sexual abuse of his



daughter and the plea deal that kept the officer out of prison, helped drive bipartisan Pennsylvania legislation strengthening accountability for authority figures who prey on children. The legislation passed unanimously in the Pennsylvania House and has become part of a larger movement to close institutional gaps that protect predatory adults instead of the children, families, and institutions and organizations who are often vulnerable to grooming by them.

Additional collaborators across the broader 2026 exhibition tour

The expanded 2026 series is collaborative and continues to involve partners and contributors across multiple cities and sites. Additional collaborators named in the 2026 series materials include Aurelia Sands Belle, Ph.D.; Emily Tilstra-Ferrell, Ph.D.; and the Small Talk Children's Advocacy Center, alongside institutional and community partners who support site-specific installations, public education, and survivor-centred programming.



BRAIDING OUR STORIES, VOICES, AND WORK TOGETHER.
THINGS CAN BE DIFFERENT. WE CAN MAKE THEM BETTER.



Justice like a River

For MLK

I stand on Indigenous land in Montana, where the mountains remember every promise broken
and every prayer still rising.

Today, I honor you, not only for your dream, but for your courage to love in a world that taught us to harden.

You spoke of justice like a river,
and I know that river. It runs through our Nations, through stolen children and silenced women, through survival that refuses to be erased.

As an Indigenous woman, I recognize your truth: that hate is taught and so is healing.
That love is not soft, it is brave, disciplined, and demanding.

They try to divide us, race against race, pain against pain,
story against story. But our struggles are braided, much like Sweetgrass and our futures must be too.

You believed love could bend the arc and I believe it still can. Love that listens. Love that stands between harm and the vulnerable. Love that calls us back to one another when fear tells us to turn away.

From these northern plains,
from Tribal Nations still standing,
I promise to add my voice to yours. We do not heal by separating. We do not rise by forgetting each other.

We come together; not by denying difference, but by honoring it, walking side by side toward justice that belongs to us all.

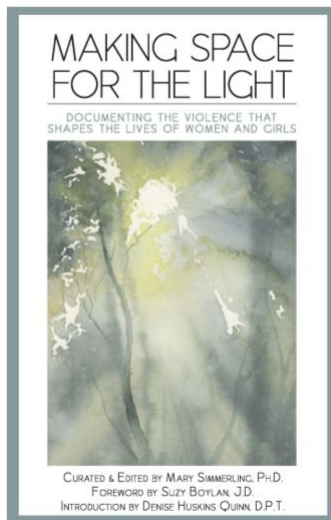
Love is still the answer. And because of you, the dream is still alive.

©2026 Jen Murphy

COMPANION PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE AT THE EXHIBIT

Making Space for the Light: Documenting the Violence that Shapes the Lives of Women and Girls

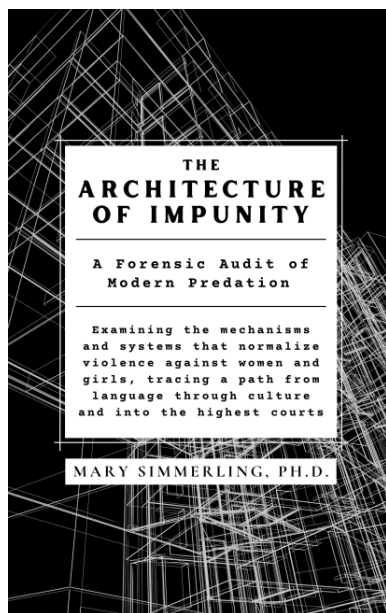
Making Space for the Light: Documenting the Violence that Shapes the Lives of Women and



Girls is part of the broader Survivors' Voices anthology series published by Write Where We Belong Press. With a Foreword by Suzy Boylan, JD and an Introduction by Denise Huskins DPT, the book brings together more than 50 contributors who share poetry, testimony, reflection, and visual materials that document the many ways violence shapes the lives of women and girls while also making room for memory, witness, resistance, and repair. The book is dedicated to Keira Kagan.

The Architecture of Impunity: A Forensic Audit of Modern Predation

The Architecture of Impunity: A Forensic Audit of Modern Predation is part of the broader



series **In Plain Sight: Violence, Silence, and the Architecture of Impunity** published by Write Where We Belong Press. It is a forensic audit of the systems that normalize violence against women and girls using a new methodology developed by Mary Simmerling called forensic moral philosophy. Moving through language, culture, law, medicine, media, and the courts, it examines how predation is softened, disguised, administratively absorbed, and made to appear ordinary. The book is part of the same artist's ecosystem for change in which writing, publishing, public art, and exhibition practice function together as testimony, record, and resistance.

Research on survivor-centred engagement shows that when survivors participate in structured, non-blaming processes that foreground their own experiences, 92% report a positive reaction, and 55% subsequently sought additional services. Survivors who reported gaining insight into their recovery were the most likely to seek help.

FOREGROUNDING LANGUAGE AS ART AND ADVOCACY

Write Where We Belong: An Artists' Ecosystem for Change

We use writing, poetry, and story as testimony and resistance.

RECLAIM YOUR VOICE

This ecosystem is built on a simple premise: healing requires truth-telling and bearing witness.

The exhibits: The "What Were You Wearing?" installations empower survivors to reclaim their stories and challenge victim-blaming myths that protect perpetrators.

WRITING AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Harnessing the powers of creative expression to reclaim our voices, create meaning, and become agents of change.

Write with us: Discover what you have to say in workshop with people who have known grief and survivors of gender-based violence.

CENTERING TRUTH- TELLING

Write Where We Belong Press curates, edits, and publishes writing that emerges from the layered geographies of violence, loss, and hope.

The anthology: *Making Space for the Light: Documenting the Violence that Shapes the Lives of Women and Girls*

Remains

A splatter of blood
in the white snow
centered among
slight depressions
where feathers
at the very tips
of wings
touched down
ever so briefly
talons grabbing
prey
a rabbit's tracks
and mine.
I remember
an article I read
last week
about men
who stalk women
who run trails—

WINIFRED TEO
[MARCH 29, 1967 - MAY 22, 1985]
KARINA VETRAND
[JULY 12, 1986 - AUGUST 2, 2016]
ELIZA FLETCHER
[NOVEMBER 9, 1987 - SEPTEMBER 2, 2022]
VANESSA MARCOTTE
[JUNE 17, 1989 - AUGUST 7, 2016]
MOLLIE TIBBITS
[MAY 8, 1998 - JULY 18, 2018]
LAKEN RILEY
[JANUARY 10, 2002 - FEBRUARY 22, 2024]
My stolen sisters
I carry you
folded in prayer
never again—

— Mary Simmerling ©2025

~29% of sexual assaults involve strangers, often in locations like trails or parks, which are considered high-risk for women. 72% of women alter their routines to avoid outdoor violence.



"What Were You Wearing?" Installation storyboard for the global exhibit. Read more on our website using the QR code below.



Things can be different. We can do better, together.
Enter the Ecosystem: WriteWhereWeBelong.ca

MAKING SPACE FOR THE LIGHT

DOCUMENTING THE VIOLENCE THAT
SHAPES THE LIVES OF WOMEN AND GIRLS



CURATED & EDITED BY MARY SIMMERLING, PH.D.
FOREWORD BY SUZY BOYLAN, J.D.
INTRODUCTION BY DENISE HUSKINS OUNN, D.P.T.

Making Space for the Light will be published in 2026.

When I Say Me

I mean
all of us—

we write with knives
scratching our stories

and all of our stories
so much the same

silence
like infinity

still
no repetition will
save us

*(ask a woman
a prophet*

women's memories
are precise

*at the end
of night—*

forgetting
is a luxury

*a morning
without fear*

a hunger we've known
all our lives

*the end
of silence)*

better be prepared
for the loss
of so many
beginnings

and I wonder:

what it might cost
to listen.

fragments that survived
to witness

©2025 Mary Simmerling

WHAT WERE YOU WEARING?

*The Role of Victim-Blaming & Indifference in Facilitating
& Perpetuating Gender-Based Crimes:
An Immersive, Survivor-Centered Exhibit*

Your Voice *Matters.* Share Your Feedback.

Thank you for experiencing this exhibit. Your perspective is vital — it helps us strengthen awareness, improve future exhibits, and continue amplifying the voices of survivors everywhere.



Your Experience

How did the exhibit affect you?



Suggestions

Help us grow & improve



Community Impact

What will you carry forward?

Scan Below to Share Your Thoughts

It only takes a few minutes — every response makes a difference.



Thank you for standing with survivors.

A CO-PRODUCTION OF WRITE WHERE WE BELONG & THE WRONG QUESTIONS PROJECT
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