

In an instant, everything can change.

Imagine if you will ... going about your day, doing what you normally do, and suddenly out of nowhere, you feel yourself roughly shoved into a deep dark space. In those first seconds, expanding into moments, hours...; there is confusion, disorientation, trepidation. Fear slowly climbs up your spine and into your imagination. You don't know this place; you don't know how large or how confined this darkness is, you don't know if there is help - inside or outside of this dark place. You don't know what to anticipate, which way to turn; how to regain control.

As your eyes adjust, you notice a small incision of light in the darkness; you begin to move ... ever so cautiously toward the light; still unsure of your surroundings, still disoriented, still feeling that fear of the unknown. As you draw closer to that small opening of light, hope begins to mingle with the fear in your imagination, it sends comfort down your spine, and you feel yourself ...finally... taking a deep breath.

In late summer of 1976, my 14-year-old sister and the 13-year-old sister of my best friend, were riding bikes together not far from our farm, in what was then the small very rural town of Marysville, WA. They were abducted at gun point, taken to the woods, and brutally raped and battered over several hours. Gratefully, they both survived.

Eventually HE was caught, a plea bargain was given and he was sentenced to prison for 2 concurrent 30 year terms; the parole board paroled him in 8 years and deported him to Canada. A few short years later he raped again and ended up in the Canadian corrections and parole system.

Because of this crime, our entire family was thrown suddenly into that dark abyss. There were not sexual assault support groups or services for victims in our area in 1976. Victims did not have the right to be informed of case status, to be treated with dignity and respect, to give a statement at sentencing; in fact, there was only one identified right for victims of crime in Washington laws in 1976 – the Crime Victims Compensation program that had begun 3 years earlier; and at that time, it didn't even pay for the sexual assault exam as it does now –

instead, my parents received the bill from the hospital for the evidence gathering exam my sister was subjected to.

The sliver of light that shone through the darkness for us came from a fledgling group of parents, family members, and friends, of victims who had disappeared, been murdered, been beaten, robbed, or sexually assaulted. Members of *Families and Friends of Missing Persons and Violent Crime Victims* had first begun meeting in 1975, they reached out and we became members of a group no one ever wants to join.

In the late 70s and into the 80s, as the group began to coalesce into a more formal organization, much of the outreach and court support services for victims in Snohomish County was provided out of my parent's electrical contracting firm. My father, Buzz Costa, served as president of the organization a few different times over the years and both my mother and I also served on the board of directors at various times. From 1989 – 1993, I served as the executive director of the group, when we received our very first VOCA grant. After I moved to the other Washington to work at the National Victim Center, the organization had a couple more executive directors and then my mother, Bobbi Costa, served in that capacity until her death in May, 2001. My sister has gone on to be a mother, a grandmother, a successful realtor, and although she still battles the anxiety of post trauma on a regular basis, she is a woman who gives generously of her time and resources to victim organizations in Snohomish County. I am extremely proud of the woman she has become.

I am also proud of the work that victim advocates in our state and nationally have accomplished over the last 4 decades; and honored to join you here today to commemorate National Victims' Rights Week.

This year's theme—Strength. Resilience. Justice.— reflects a vision for the future in which all victims are strengthened by the response they receive, organizations are resilient in response to challenges, and communities can seek collective justice and healing.

During this week we remember the hard work of victims, victim advocates, and allies that laid the groundwork for the rights and services available for victims today.

Here are just some of the early Highlights of Victims Rights brought about by the active work of Victim Advocates:

Recall that the first time crime victims were even mentioned in Washington State Statute was when the Crime Victims Compensation Program was implemented in 1973.

In 1979, our state legislature passed the Victims of Sexual Assault Act; and, provided some funding for shelters for domestic violence victims.

In 1981, we joined with a small group of advocates from prosecutor's offices to pass our state's Crime Victims Bill of Rights; for the first time, acknowledging that victims deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, the right to be notified and informed of their rights and case status, the right to protection from intimidation, harassment and harm; and the right to make a victim impact statement at sentencing.

In that same year, our state legislature terminated the Crime Victims Compensation Program by not funding it in the budget. We advocated at the legislature and in the media about the importance of this critical program for victims.

In 1982, the legislature created a new method of funding the CVC program out of the Public Safety and Education Account – reinstating this program that is the life ring of last resort for many victims of crime; and implemented a penalty assessment to help fund comprehensive victim services in Prosecutor's Offices.

In this 4th decade of our work, I think it is appropriate that we reflect on the many changes in the 1980s and 90s that laid the foundation for the rights and services available to victims today.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan proclaimed the first national "Crime Victims Week" in April; and in a

1982 Rose Garden ceremony, President Reagan appointed members to the Task Force on Victims of Crime, which held public hearings in six cities across the nation to focus attention on the needs of crime victims. The Task Force's Final Report offered 68 recommendations that became the framework for the

advancement of new programs and policies. Its final recommendation, to amend the Sixth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution to guarantee that "the victim, in every criminal prosecution, shall have the right to be present and to be heard at all critical stages of judicial proceeding," became a vital source of new energy to secure constitutional amendments for victims' rights in each state.

In 1983,

The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) was established by the U.S. Department of Justice within the Office of Justice Programs to implement recommendations from the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime. OVC established a national resource center, developed training for professionals, and developed model legislation to protect victims' rights.

Also in 1983, U.S. Attorney General William French Smith established a Task Force on Family Violence, which held six public hearings across the United States; and he issued the first Attorney General Guidelines for Victim and Witness Assistance, outlining standards for federal victim and witness assistance and the implementation of victims' rights contained in the federal Victim and Witness Protection Act of 1982.

Here in WA State, 1983 brought the creation of the DOC Victim Witness Notification Program, the first in the nation. It was created in reaction to the horrific revenge murders of Rene and Shawna Wicklund and Barbara Hendrickson, by Charles Campbell who had been released early by the parole board and was in a work release facility not far from where his victims lived.

It wasn't until the enactment of the 1990 Community Protection Act that a similar notification program was created in DSHS for victims and witnesses of juvenile offenders, sexually violent predators, and those committed to state mental hospitals.

In 1984, on the National level:

President Reagan signed the Justice Assistance Act, which established a financial assistance program for state and local government and funded 200 new victim service programs throughout the nation.

That same year, the passage of the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) established the Crime Victims Fund, made up of federal criminal fines, penalties, and bond forfeitures, to support state victim compensation and local victim assistance programs.

- In its' first fiscal year, 1985 - The Crime Victims Fund deposited a total of \$68 million
- In fiscal year 2016 – The Crime Victims Fund deposited \$1.48 billion

These funds have helped to provide burial funds, lost wages, mental health counseling, and other vital victim support services throughout the nation and are THE KEY to the expansion and professionalism of victim services since its inception.

In 1989, six years after it was first recommended by the Task Force on Victims of Crime, voters in our state ratified an Amendment to our state constitution, found in Article 1, Section 35, giving victims constitutional rights to be informed, present, and heard at all critical stages of the criminal justice system.

There have been many other gains, retreats, and restorations of victims' rights and services throughout the years; but I only have a few moments left to remind you about WHY these rights and services are so important.

Victims of crime are the injured party in a criminal act.

Over the history of our country, we evolved from a system that required the victim to seek direct redress from an offender, to a system that viewed crime as a breaking of a social contract with society at large and so, punishments inflicted by the system should primarily serve to deter the criminal, to repay his/her debt to society, and to deter others from committing similar acts; thus, leaving the victim entirely out of the process.

Beginning in the 1970s, victims and our allies worked to bring balance back to the system by focusing on giving victims legal rights to be treated with dignity and respect; and to be informed, present, and heard throughout the criminal justice process.

Along with those rights the focus was also to ensure that victims received services as early as possible to assist them in reconstructing their lives.

Victimization thrusts an individual into that dark abyss I described earlier. They find themselves in a chaotic atmosphere for which they are unprepared. Regardless of the crime, victims may experience intense fear, helplessness, or horror, and may even develop posttraumatic stress symptoms that stay with them for many years.

Many victims change their thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors because of their experience. Victimization may alter their sense of freedom and influence the choices they make about where to live, where to travel, and what time of day they carry out their business, social, or recreational activities.

Crime victims may become afraid of people who share the offender's characteristics (i.e., age, race, voice tone, clothing, body language, or distinctive features.)

Their behavior may change toward the people around them. For example, parents may be too confused and upset to pay attention to their children's needs. If one of their children was injured or killed, their other children may not receive ongoing care and attention while the parent mourns. Husbands, wives, and partners may withdraw from the people they love. Children who were nonviolent may begin acting out toward family, friends, and pets.

Victims also differ in how they attempt to derive meaning from their experience.

Some victims may express forgiveness toward the offender, using words like "healing," "closure," "survivor," or "recovery" to describe their experience. Others have a strong, negative reaction to these words and are angered by their experience. Most victims will feel a range of emotions.

The degree of threat to life and physical injury affects the risk of difficulty in coping.

We know that two key post-victimization factors can increase the likelihood of victims developing mental health difficulties:

1. Lack of poor social support systems (which is why victims' services are vital)
2. The degree of exposure to the justice system (many victims will describe their experience with the criminal justice system as even more traumatizing than the crime they experienced.)

We know more now about the short and long term impacts of trauma. Scientists can now observe the human brain in action. Using brain-scan technology, they have observed that trauma actually changes the structure and function of the brain, at the point where the frontal cortex (the emotional brain), and the brain stem (our survival brain), converge.

We also know through brain research that in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event, the memory files of the brain are scattered and more difficult to access in any orderly fashion.

Which is why police reports right after the crime are not often a good measure of the harm incurred ...

A law enforcement officer who attended a training recently noted: "I had a lightbulb moment when the comparison between officer involved shootings and sexual assault investigative interviews was made. We give our folks (law enforcement) 24 – 72 hours to "settle" before an interview, but expect a sexual assault victim to rattle off specifics immediately and in order."

As we interact with victims of crime in whatever capacity we encounter them, it is important to keep in mind that there are some common elements of an emotional trauma:

- Crime is unexpected.
- The person is unprepared.
- There is nothing the person could do to prevent it from happening.
- Trauma changes the brain.
- It is not the event that determines whether something is traumatic to someone, but the individual's experience of the event.
- We cannot predict how a given person will react to a particular event.
- And, while many crime victims achieve considerable reconstruction during the first year after the crime; there is no hard and fast rule for recovery. Every victim and their reconstruction process is unique.

I want to thank each of you for being willing to shine some light into that dark abyss to let victims know there is light, there is hope, there is compassion, and that they are strong and resilient. And that together, we will continue to work toward justice for all.

Thank you for what YOU do, each and every day.