

The Women's Center Monologues:
5th Anniversary Edition

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FIFTH EDITION

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“Founded in 1979, The Women’s Center’s mission is to inspire and empower women, men, and children to overcome violence, crisis, and poverty. It is a place of hope, opportunity, and better futures for families of Tarrant County.”

We would like to start our chapbook with a content warning. There will be mentions of sexual assault, sexual violence, physical violence, molestation, incest, and suicide attempts. Please make sure to take care of yourself before, during, and after reading.

This is the 5th and final edition of The Women's Center Chapbook, and we are both excited and honored to take you with us as we navigate the monologues that we've collected over the past five years from The Women's Center employees and community partners, and the survivors who've sought out the Center's help. To every one of our contributors from the past, we want to extend our deepest gratitude and admiration for sharing your stories with us. From Me Too, to the Pandemic, to the everchanging future, each of the contributors have been such a continuous pillar of strength for everyone around them. Your dedication to encouraging hope through your outreach in the community as well as the vulnerability and triumphs you've shared with our chapbook's staff over the years has been nothing short of inspiring.

The motto of The Women's Center is "Hope Starts Here," though, in our interactions with the staff, survivors, and community partners, we've found that hope truly starts with them and simply finds its intersection at The Women's Center. In this chapbook, you will be taken on a journey of losing hope and finding it again, and it is our aim to share with our readers the sheer impact that something as simple as hope and faith can have on someone's life.

In addition to our contributors, we'd like extend a warm thank you to Dr. Chantel L. Carlson for her consistent support and compassion throughout the undertaking of this project over the past five years, to Katharine Collier Esser for making this project possible and supporting us from the sidelines for all of these years, and to our staff who've dedicated themselves to creating such an impactful product. Finally, we thank the readers and hope that these monologues do their part in fostering faith and hope in the coming tomorrow for everyone.

Thank you so much.

Skylar Cain and Adrienne Stallings, Editors-in-Chief, Spring 2023

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THE WOMEN'S CENTER EMPLOYEES

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LEAH

I liked the word “journey” as the word of hope, because journey is something you can choose your path on. You can choose if you need to take a pause, if you need assistance on that journey, and not every day is going to be perfect or, you know, there’s not a magic, like, date of... this makes me think of a comment that a student shared with me that their friends were not being understanding and saying things like, “Well, it’s been, you know, three months why aren’t you over it?” There’s no end date. There’s no, there’s no prescribed...it’s a journey, but healing can be found, and you have support, and you have care as you may need it along that journey.





Anchored in Misconception



MÓNICA

Unfortunately, you have these TV shows who show you like a victim is supposed to act a specific way. You're supposed to cry. You're supposed to do this. I've seen victims.... I walked into the hospital one time and this girl was laughing hysterically, and I understood: this is her way of coping. And she's like, "Oh my gosh, can you believe I just got raped yesterday? Oh, my—" ... And I'm just like, okay, look, laugh about this. And then afterwards, the shock wore off and everything, but I've seen it all. I've seen people sleep through it. I've seen people get angry. I've seen people—there's no specific way that victims act. And I think the average person who has no idea is expecting that. And when it isn't that, then it didn't happen. "But why didn't you call for help?" "Why did you just let it happen?" Yeah. "Why didn't I fight back? Because he had his hands around my neck, and I thought I was going to die."

KATHARINE

I always like to let people know, you know, in Texas, just a reminder, two in five women and one in five men report experiencing sexual assault at some point in their lifetime.

OCTAVIA

In the beginning, it took a long time to get help. [I] knew I needed help and things like that but didn't know any resources, especially in my community. Things that happen to you that are very impactful like this, they aren't talked about. And so, I have always wanted to be able to at least, you know, if it's just one person, like through things that I learned, obviously I needed help for myself, but, if I could help the next person just to, you know, even just information is helpful, and they can make their own decision.

MIKE

I think you also have to educate people, sometimes, on what's really involved in what happens. I'll give you an example. It's not taken from any particular case, but I heard an attorney in court saying, "Well, Your Honor, my client was strangled by the guy." And the judge said, "That's bad." And you're like, that's it? I mean, we're kind of moving along from there. You know, I'll take some points off for him, but... And then in contrast, why just say, "My client was strangled?" Tell the judge, tell the public what really happened. "The guy came in, he smacked through the blocked bedroom door, he broke the door, he grabbed me by the neck with both hands, he slammed me up against one wall. He pulled me away and slammed me up against another wall. He threw me to the ground, and he shoved all of his weight onto my chest and onto my neck with his hands still around it. And when I woke up at that point, I don't remember anything. I woke up, and I defecated on myself, and he had left." That's a hell of a lot different story than saying "My client got strangled." And so I think part of our mission—and you've got to pick your place and your time for doing it this way—is to educate the public. What's really going on? What are we really working to solve and improve? Because a lot of people don't have that understanding. You know, mentally they understand, cognitively they know the problem. But did you really understand the problem? Do you really understand that as a result of this, my client may have to be living in a shelter? My client may have lost transportation? Have you ever thought about how long you spend during your day waiting on a bus? If all you have to do is rely on the bus to get around, do you realize how much of your day you waste standing around waiting on a bus, and then going and finding the next bus stop and waiting around on that bus stop just to accomplish some basic things? I mean, I think a lot of people don't have that understanding, and if they did, you would hope that they would be more sensitive to it.

CONNIE

Why would anybody make the ones that actually were brave enough to walk in feel like they're lying?

MIKE

Anybody who's a possible client is somebody who's dealing with something bad that's happened to them, either as a primary victim or a secondary victim of some type of violence or sexual assault. So that person may not even come here. They may just be thinking, "What should I do? Should I call this place called The Women's Center? Should I call the Rape Crisis Hotline, which The Women's Center operates?" And the answer to all of that is: understand that you don't have to do this by yourself. You don't have to deal with all this by yourself. Everybody's story is unique. Everything is individual, you know, so we can all look at it and go, "Every one of those flowers is different." But almost everybody's story fits into some type of category. Something that, yes, I've seen a lot of things like this before. I haven't seen your story, but I've seen stories similar to your story. And from all that, all sorts of people here at The Women's Center have learned valuable lessons.

GREG

And I mean, the reality of it is, very, very, very few of them are making it up.

KATHARINE

I just wish, I don't know, I really wish people felt comfortable enough talking about these things just generally, because by not talking about it, it just makes it more taboo and makes it feel heavier and heavier than it needs to. You know, we don't need to make it feel heavy, it's already heavy enough for these survivors to be there to help them through it and make it lighter.

LEAH

Yes, continuing the awareness and not being afraid to talk about it, because when that happens, then hopefully that will reduce the stigma and people will feel comfortable to report, if that's something they're comfortable doing.

CHRISSE

And I think through—especially through recent years, I think society has come to accept that there are behaviors that are inappropriate and not okay, and they shouldn't happen. And so, I think that that's been a big change, that it's even a conversation. It's a conversation that I can easily have with my kids who are now young adults, but I could have that conversation with them in their teens and now, which I think twenty years ago that we wouldn't have even had that conversation.

MÓNICA

If we're not comfortable or feel safe enough or even explain that it's healthy to have conversations about sex for healthy relationships, there's no way we're ever going to talk about the abuse. It's such a shameful piece. And there's so much of like, well, what was the woman doing? Like, was it the way she was dressed, was it the way she was coqueteando? Was it the way she was, you know, flirting, or what were you wearing? And all these misconceptions. I remember growing up and hearing the "Mija, you gotta be careful what you're wearing because you're going to be asking for it." And I'm like, "I don't understand. What am I asking for?"

CONNIE

And I can't believe it's 2021 and we're still having these conversations with people about...listen to yourself. I mean, I have parents say that to kids, their own kids like, "Well, what'd you think's going to happen? You're a stripper." I mean, trying to feed four kids so, does it matter really?



KATHARINE

It just really shows you how strong people are and how you, you really just get to see hope and healing. And it is sad. It's horrible. These crimes are horrible, but it really also shows you the best in humanity, you know? So I don't know when I finally stopped thinking, "Oh, I can't even do anything," but eventually it went away with a lot of supervision, a lot of help from my supervisor at that Rape Crisis Center, and then the next place I went, as well as my LPC supervisor. I just wish, I don't know, I just, I really wish people felt comfortable enough talking about these things just generally.

SARAH

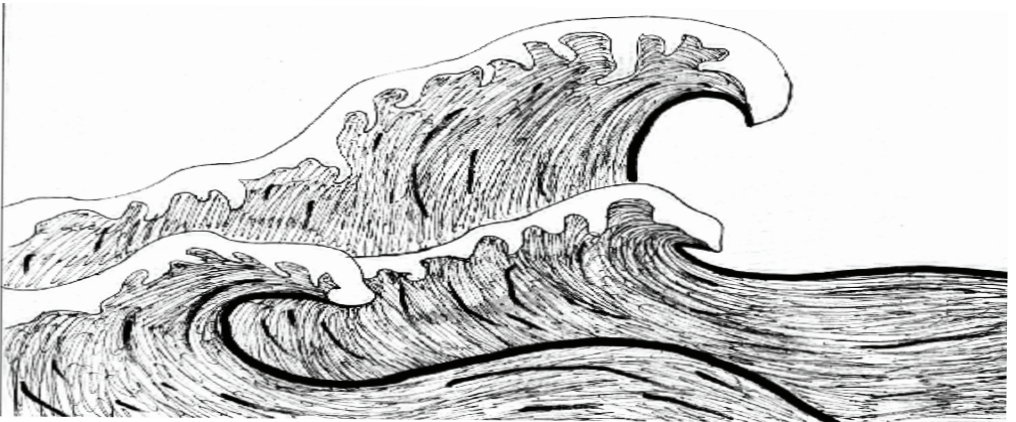
It also has changed my perspective of, I guess like working with survivors and really understanding how resilient people can be and how it really makes me feel, like I understand and can be more understanding of people when they may act in a way that doesn't make sense to me, because one of our longtime employees here, it's kind of her motto to say, "You know, if it's hysterical, it's probably historical." Meaning, if they're acting hysterically, there's probably a reason behind it. If they are making it difficult for you, they're probably being triggered by something. So I think I've been able to kind of have a good or a better understanding of that and whenever people are acting in a way that doesn't really make sense to me, being able to say, you know, take myself out of it. It's not about me. It's about something that's making them uncomfortable.

HANNAH

Before I worked here, I unfortunately was one of the ones that sometimes didn't believe everyone's stories. I'm like, "Oh, there's no way that could have happened." And now that's the complete opposite. I actually talk to people who say that, and I try to get them to see that people, people are saying what they mean. They're being truthful, you know, so that's what it used to be like. But, once I worked here, I really did realize that trauma comes in many forms, from many things. I mean there's not trauma that is just in one form. A lot of different people have issues, and they come to us for help. ...The Me Too movement happened while I was working here. And that was a big, big, big deal. And I think, I think that has helped. I mean it helped me, obviously has helped everyone in the area to feel safer about speaking up. I remember it was a big deal. Katharine actually was interviewed on—I can't remember which news channel—but she and Alicia, I think, were both interviewed, and we had it on Facebook Live, and everyone was watching. And it's, it's how we got people to know who we are. Thankfully. I mean, we had a flood of new clients, new phone calls, people calling from hospitals, just everything because of that movement.

ANDREW

Just know that you have value and just know that you do matter. I think that's, I think that's something that we all need to remind ourselves of every now and then.



Describe The Women's Center in 3 words...

Necessary, Peaceful, Versatile

Hope, Transformation, Courage

Compassion, Empowerment, Healing

Determined, Responsive, Involved

Encouraging, Empowering, Helpful

Survivor and Support Impactful

Fun, Variety, Supportive

Resource, Life Changing

Professional, Respectful, Compassionate

Describe The Women's Center in 3 words?

Hope Starts Here

Navigating the Way

FRAN

Our tagline is “Hope Starts Here.” I hear it all the time, I see it all the time, and I truly want potential clients to know hope truly does start when you open the doors to The Women’s Center.

BECKA

I was a poor graduate student and trying to make ends meet. In one of my classes up at UNT, someone announced a scholarship that was available to graduate students, and I was all over that idea—some kind of a scholarship that had some kind of monetary funds to it. And so I applied and ended up winning the scholarship and found out I was the first recipient of this particular scholarship. It was named by Mary Lyons, who was one of the original volunteers in our employment program here at The Women’s Center, and also one of the friends of Karen Perkins, who is our founding mother. She had this scholarship set up in honor of her daughter. Her daughter had been murdered, and so, tragically, Mary had decided that she wanted to honor her daughter and set up a scholarship for graduate students, because her daughter was working in this field and also was a consultant here at The Women’s Center. And so when I won the scholarship, of course I wanted to learn more about Mary and her daughter. I wasn’t familiar with the story, and so I met Mary for lunch one day so that we could get to know each other. And I heard about her daughter and I was very inspired by that, and she suggested I check out The Women’s Center, and I said, “That sounds great.” As a graduate student not far from graduating with a counseling degree, I wanted to learn more about this organization that served crime and abuse victims. So I did and loved what I heard about it and became a volunteer. And That’s how my experience started here. So technically, I was a volunteer before I started working here and fell in love with the work and fell in love with the people. And there was an opening that came open, and so while I was still finishing my degree, I jumped at the chance. And that was over twenty years ago.

JASMINE

The Center, when it was started in 1979, was started by a group of women who really saw this hole in Tarrant County, where women found themselves without support.... There were less women in the labor force, so if you didn't have a husband who was able to [help] pay [expenses], if your husband left you, became disabled, passed away, there were not a lot of resources for you or your kids to support yourself. And they saw that as a really big hole in the community, and they wanted to do something to address that. And it started in our founding mother's living room. Those women who were involved in starting The Women's Center still live in this community. I posted on Nextdoor where I work, and one of my neighbors reached out and said, "I was a friend of Karen Perkins, and I was part of starting The Women's Center." So those women are still with us in Tarrant County, and their efforts are part of what makes this agency what it is today.

BECKA

Our founding mother always talked about how the outstretched hand always yields better results than the closed fist.

TERESI

When I look back at the history of the Women's Center, you know, it started out as almost grassroots around someone's kitchen table, an idea that there were victims out there that weren't taken care of. So we've gone from probably three or four people having a conversation maybe over coffee about what this community needs to this agency. With services that are, they're all encompassing: education, employment, housing, victim services. There's nothing that, that they can't at least have gotten to send somebody in the right direction for. We have a legal team, and the fact that they serve men and children, as well as women, I think is important.

VALERIE

It's for everybody. It's for men, it's for children, and it's for women, and it's not just a place like a shelter like people think it might be. It's a place where you can go to get the help that you need and get the guidance and the direction in your life that you need and hoped, so you have that hope so you can have that hope of light at the end of the tunnel.

TERESI

This is a determined agency to make change, and they're involved in all aspects of the community with the homeless, employment, education, rape crisis victim services, and they are responsive. When somebody needs something, this agency comes through.

HEATHER

The only thing we're told on the phone is 'you have the victim,' you know, 'at the hospital.' We're not told if it's a male, female, we're not told their socioeconomic [status], we're not told skin color, anything like that. And it doesn't matter. But in the same sense, you have to be, you have to be knowledgeable and aware of cultural... certain ethnicities look at things differently, and so you have to be sensitive to cultural differences, to the way we would respond in our response is always the same. It's compassionate, it's support, but a homeless victim is going to need different things than, you know, a 22-year-old college girl in the sense of with the homeless, I'm going to provide them with lots of extra clothing and toiletries, and I need to give them a place to sleep in a shelter that night and all that.

MS. B

During our training one time, somebody said, "Can you just write out a script?" And I looked at him and I said, "Well, you can't, because every story is different, and what you write one day is not going to work the next time that you go, or the next person you talk to you, because everybody's different, and you have to reach them where they are." And so, if we're listening, then you'll know which way to go in your conversation...For those who don't have a family, we're here. For those who do have a family, we just get added to the family, so everything that we do requires flexibility.

ANA

I learned a lot of things. My ex-husband had committed a few crimes, and even at that time, you know, my therapist can attest that I struggled to even realize that I had been abused, because it wasn't the, you know, typical physical abuse that we're brought up to really know, so, I knew I had a lot of mixed feelings and a lot of anxiety and stress from the things that had happened in our marriage, but I couldn't really identify what that was until I came here and had worked through it. So that was a big thing to say, this has happened to me. And then just, you know, managing being a single mom and the difficult relationship, or lack thereof, with my ex-husband and their father. And so, I think that's probably the big thing.

LORI

And I talked with a lady yesterday, actually, she was calling for her daughter. Her daughter was actually an adult, but Mom was still, you know, kind of testing the waters and figuring out what's out there and what to do. And I think Mom told me about four times, she says, "I don't know who to turn to. I didn't know you existed. I, I didn't know who to call. I've never heard of The Women's Center. We've never done this before." And my only answer to her was, "I'm really glad you don't know, because that means you've never had to access the system and experience this." But I was able to give her a referral to The Women's Center and a person to talk to knowing that her daughter is going to need lots of counseling.

ANDREW

We get a lot of victims that feel like they should be reluctant or feel reluctant to kind of come forward and make these, these reports because they're scared of victim retaliation, or they're scared that we're not going to be able to do anything to help them out. And so, it felt really good for me to kind of, at least one person at one time, be able to kind of reaffirm with her that like, you know, we, we will help you. You know, whenever I say I got your back, I got your back through the whole thing, like we'll take care of you. And so that felt really good to be able to say that, but then be able to back up time after time after time.

MELISSA

My job is to believe. No matter what anybody else says. My job is to be there in that moment with that child and believe what they say.

MS. B

I ask them why they're nervous. A lot of times it's because nobody really will believe, and I'll say, oh, we've been here for 30 years, and that's what we specialize in, sexual assault, domestic violence, and suicide and that we take your story seriously. That this is one place that your story is safe, and that we're here to help you get through the trauma that you've gone through.

ANA

I mean, prior to, you know, those crimes, I'm not sure that I even knew that this building was here. You know, and then learning from my therapist all of the different things that this place provides, like, information about trauma and financial services, and I think they've even offered, like, when I had a lot of legal issues at first, they can look over those things. So just, just that it's here, and it's a resource for women and children, especially you know, if you've been in a situation where you are the victim of something, it's always nice to know what your resources are...I know there were times when I first came here before that, that I, I couldn't see the light at the end. I felt like I was drowning or struggling or on my knees, but it, if you just keep pushing, it'll get better, and you'll be able to look back and see that whatever that huge struggle was wasn't as big or isn't as big anymore as it was at the time. If you just keep moving forward and, and have an open mind, you know, to help yourself get out of whatever difficult situation that you're in.

HANNAH

There was one instance... we used to close at 5:30, so my job was to be at the desk from 5:00 to 5:30 in case anyone came in or needed something after hours. And there was a lady that came in at 5:28 one day. So, my first thought is like, "Oh my gosh, why? Like, I want to go home." But she was very distraught, and she needed someone other than me. I couldn't really help her exactly with what she needed; I'm not trained in how to help with trauma. And that's what she had. She had a major trauma, and she said it literally just happened. So that breaks my heart just even thinking about it again. It had just happened, and she came here because she had heard about us, which is awesome. So I was, I was terrified that there wasn't going to be anyone here, because it's 5:28, and we close at 5:30 and most people leave at 5:00. I'm terrified because I really want to help this lady and I don't want to tell her, you know, "Sorry, we can't help you now. You can come back tomorrow." It's because she needed help now. And she was uncomfortable. She was not feeling safe. So, luckily, I did find someone that was in the building. And that goes back to me saying, I mean there's always someone here that can help, and that's what I love. She came up and she actually spoke with her back in her office, and it wasn't too long, but I think she had kind of put the client more at ease and gave her a sense of direction, so she knew what she was going to do the next day. She knew that there'll be more people in the office, and she knew that she could come back, and she felt a little safer. So, she did leave. But before she left, she had tears in her eyes, and she was telling me thank you. And in my mind, I didn't really do anything, but just her saying thank you like that... I have more of an impact than I think.

KELLY

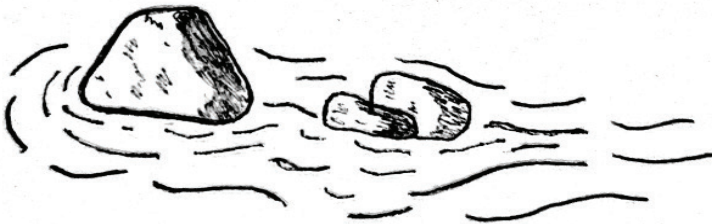
Early on in our program, I remember a case we had, it was a sexual assault case, the victim was very young, I want to say three or four-years-old, probably about five when they went to court, and the victim went to counseling at The Women's Center and they received play therapy. The Women's Center had a play therapist at the time, and she is just so energetic, so enthusiastic and is great with the children. And she came to the court hearing, and they'll come—the counselors will come to court hearings if necessary for the victims. She came to the court hearing, and you could just tell how it made the victim so much more at ease, and it seemed to kind of—even at that age, you could see they, the child felt kinda empowered about being in court and a lot more comfortable about being there.

KIM

Like children have to testify. They have to be in the same room as the defendant. They have to be cross-examined, all of those things have to happen in order for us to prosecute. And, I have victims all the time who, they desperately want the person prosecuted, but they also desperately don't wanna go into trial, because they know what that moment looks like, and I'm not going to lie to them and tell them it's going to be easy. I will work with them to get them ready for it, but it's never going to be easy, and so the more partners I have like The Women's Center helping me get her to that moment—because I'm...I need their help. And so, that's the kind of collaborative processes we have with The Women's Center that are just invaluable. Like, I, I literally couldn't do my job without them.

TIM

One reason that I chose to work here is because in my community, the African American community, there is not a lot of voice given to child abuse and sexual assault, and that is really one of the reasons why I came, and why I stayed, is because there needs to be an African American voice, I think, to add to this discussion, and there also needs to be a male voice as well. I'm a Play It Safe trainer, and this is my fifth year, and in the five years out of all the trainers we've had, we've only had two men. Because a lot of times from the outside looking in, you see Women's Center, and you're thinking, it's just restricted to just dealing with women's issues. But as I came to work here, you know, one thing that I discovered is that...even though it started off specifically dealing with women, as the program has grown, particularly the Play It Safe program, it is dealing with counseling for men, women, boys, and girls.



PAMMELLA

Play It Safe is always educating about child sexual abuse and physical abuse. And the interesting thing about that is I was a caseworker for 10 years out of that 23 and I was a supervisor, so I saw it firsthand, and I can't tell you the times I say to kids it's not your fault. You didn't cause this to happen. That is part of the script for Play it Safe, because victims will almost always think they've done something to cause it to happen, whether it's physical abuse or sexual abuse, and so when I saw that originally at the interview years ago, and it's the same thing I've been saying one on one to kids for years, and so to say it in large numbers is so helpful. And the fact that we back it up every year is so important, because kids being kids, they listen to adults, and one year if we did it one year and not succeeding years, it probably wouldn't stick with them, because it's hard sometimes for the kids to understand we can tell on an adult, even adults that we're supposed to trust, or you know you're not supposed to tell on them. And just making sure that they know that there's at least one person they can tell...some kids are blessed, just by birthright, with a large group of people that they can trust. Other children are not so fortunate, just depending on where you're born and who you're born into. You may be born into a family that doesn't have any trustworthy people in it. And that's hard to imagine, especially if you came from a family that has people that you can trust and can go to in an emergency, but I just saw it firsthand, so I know up close and personal that some kids don't get that, you know, I always want them to feel comfortable... I have had kids that will tell you, I've never told anyone this before, and you know they're really afraid, and hopefully by the time they finish talking about that, hopefully they at least think they have someone who wants to help. They don't think they're going to be absolutely alone.

MIKE

We can do so many things to help you get through this— therapy, you know, that's the biggest one. Just helping you out, helping you process through, helping you work through it, giving you alternatives to things that if you're thinking you've got to do this by yourself, you know, be manly enough to, or tough enough to, or there's nobody that can help me, nobody will understand me. You're not right. You don't have to do it by yourself.

KATHARINE

And it's going to make me cry thinking about it cuz it's just...I think that a lot of people think that way about survivors. You know, they think, I'm gonna mess this person up, you know, they need more, they need more, they need more. And [one of] my professors just said, "I'm here. We're gonna get through it. You know, she trusts you. She wouldn't have just told you that if she, somehow, she didn't trust you." Because I think it was our second time meeting that she actually told me...And then it came time for my internship, and they placed me at the Rape Crisis Center again. And I was like, I mean, I guess I gotta lean into this, right? And so, I just kept having that feeling though, even after I did my internship and graduated and was just working in the field as an LPC intern for a little bit, that oh my gosh, you know, there's nothing I can do. Like, I'm never gonna...how, how, how can I show people that the world can get better, that they can heal? I think that this kind of crime feels so heavy, right? But what I have learned over and over and over again is, and I really don't say this lightly, but I really believe this is the worst crime that someone can have happen to them. I really believe that, because you take murder, it affects everybody else, but that person, you're, you're dead. You know, this is the most violating, most personal crime, and people don't even believe you when you tell them, you know? And I just kept thinking about that and just kept thinking, I am just not good enough. I just can't help people. There's just so much. And I just started learning, you know what, I don't need to be more, I can just stick with my counseling theory.

CONNIE

And so, we can't take the patient's trauma away. And as nurses, we want to fix things, right? And so, what I've told my staff is that we have to be the ones that are there for a patient in their time of need. And we have to be able to give them all of us and the best that we possibly can on their darkest day. But when that's over, you have to shut that light out and know, and you'll know because they will hug you, they will thank you, they will be glad that they came, that you did the best thing and the best job that you could for them in that moment of trauma for them and shut the light out, drive home... and you paint, as I paint—whatever your, whatever your...thing is, whatever your Zen— is to feel better. Because again, we can't take those things away, you just have to remember that, but they're going somewhere where they need somebody to be that person right then, and you have to—if we're going to do this, we're going to do it right, and we're going to do it well.

ANDREW

Yeah. Yeah, and I think, I think that's tough for some detectives, some officers to do, and I think really early on, especially in a young officer's career, it's tough to just do cop stuff, cop stuff, cop stuff, and you're like—cause it's all really cool, but it is traumatic to go through, and then you leave work and then you want to talk about cop stuff, cop stuff, and you ignore it - and that's all you do, like you kind of make that your whole life a little bit, and, I think early on in my career, I kinda got sucked into that and kinda started developing some really unhealthy habits to, to really cope with all that. And it really took me recognizing that you need to have, you have to have hobbies or, or things to occupy your time apart from this job. And, I've got a wife, I've got two little kids, and I've got a three-year-old and an eight-year-old daughter, and they occupy every second of my time, so, I've got, you know, I'm dressing up like a Disney princess this hour, and then I'm watching my eight-year-old ride her bike this hour.

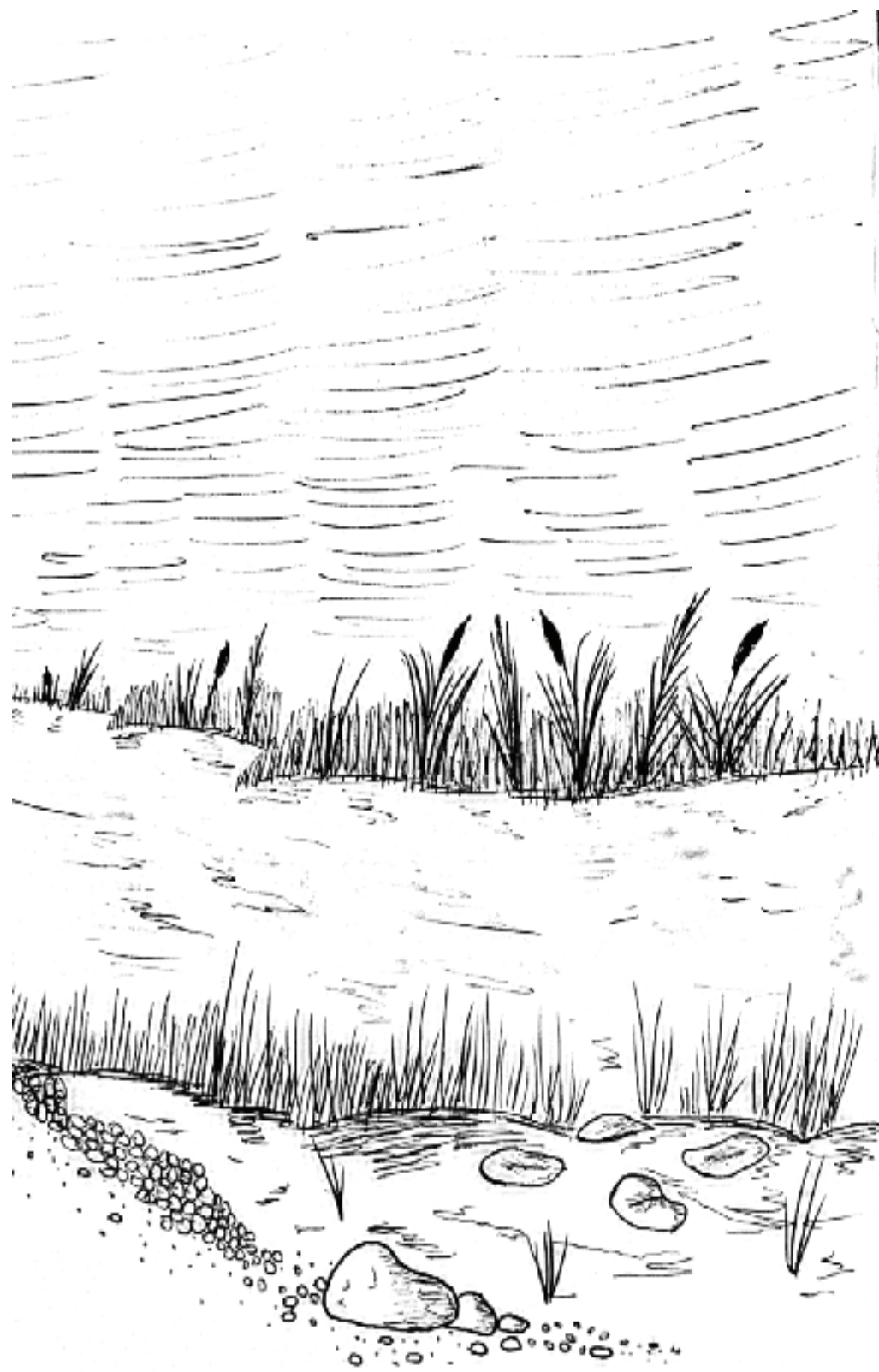
LORI

There's those one or two cases that get in your head and you will always take them with you. So I do various things when I really feel like I need a therapist: I call my mom, because mom is a social worker in private practice, and I tell her, "Mom, I need a therapist, I don't need a mother." And she knows to put her social work hat on and listen. So I do that—not a lot, but whenever I need it.

MELISSA

I had a class that was challenging one time, and I just kinda sat down afterwards, and I was just like, oh my goodness. And on the way out a young man stopped, and he was like, "Hey. You did a great job today." And he was serious. He didn't have to say that. And that was, I think that was a senior in my class...Anyway, it made my day. I just had a whole classroom of people that I felt like were not listening to me and weren't taking it seriously. And then this one kid left and was like, hey, like that acknowledgement that he knew it was tough, and he listened. I was like, that was worth it. It changed my whole day.





KIM

So one of the things we discovered along the years, not just we, but the global we, like law enforcement, is obviously any kind of case that involves a victim, it truly does take a village, right? The process really started with crimes against children back in kind of the late eighties, early nineties where people realized, like you have to provide services to children at the same time we're working on cases. And...I think that we've always had agencies that provided services, and we always had law enforcement, but to bring them together is relatively new, like, I mean, like the nineties on, like before that everyone was kind of their own entity in the storm, but what The Women's Center does with us is we, in a couple of different ways, collaborate directly with them so that we can provide—a lot of our collaboration involves a lot of training, like last year, for instance. The Women's Center and I, and some, and some police officers and Connie from JPS, we actually went on kind of a training tour of Tarrant County to teach trauma-based training to law enforcement.

CATHY

We do have a greater understanding of the effect of trauma on an individual—and not just the life of the survivor, but every life that that person touches.... When The Women's Center started forty years ago, the founding mother (whose picture's in our lobby, and I hope you take a minute to look at that and read her words that we have on the wall), her vision was to grow a community that would provide better services for victims. So back in the day when a rape victim was at a hospital, you would wait in the lobby with everyone. They'd call you by name, state why you're there, and you're up and walking, you know, in front of everybody there, and you're at the hospital for twelve hours. Today JPS has a separate area for victims of sexual assault. So you're ushered into that space. It's private. The wait is a lot less time. THR is now providing services as well, and they're working hard to make things better as well. So we work with law enforcement, we work with attorneys, judges, and just the community in trying to build a wraparound service that can recognize the importance of providing good services and fast services to victims of assault.

SARAH

I work with mostly professionals in the community. I do a little bit of work with other adult populations as well, but I would say my main clients are professionals. So we work with several of the law enforcement communities around or law enforcement departments around the community. And really my role with them is trying to help them understand how to interact with survivors in a sensitive way. Sexual assault, sexual abuse is such a traumatic event in somebody's life and being able to help them understand if you are the first responder, if you're the first person who is interacting with them after this event has happened, it's critical that you do that in a way that is sensitive to what they've been through, and that's empowering to them to heal. So that's, that's really my role to help them understand how to work with survivors in a sensitive way.

CONNIE

And after some meetings and some challenges that you have in everyone's work, we came together to create this training team that was law-enforcement based. So we, as a team, were going out and training law enforcement officers who are going to be responding, first responders, to people who would call for an outcry of a sexual assault and training them on trauma-informed conversations that they may not realize verbiage really does make a difference, you know, and how you say things. And it was such a good— we trained so many officers, and we were excited to keep going and do more. And then of course COVID hit and we kind of hit a wall with any kind of outside training, but that would be a moment or a time that I could feel really proud as a community and partnering with The Women's Center that we were really making a difference, because when you go at it and you're not just training other advocates or other nurses, and you're going out of your discipline and hitting that first responder. It's such a good thing to work together.

KIM

And so, what that meant was we went out—because we know the very first interaction the victim has with law enforcement is so key to how they perceive how the system's gonna treat them. Right? And it's hard to talk to someone who's just been sexually abused, and, you know, let's say it's a guy cop who's like, "I don't want to talk about private parts." You know, it's a very, it's a very hard moment. And so, to better teach that moment and to, to help them understand what the victim is doing in that moment, so they can better understand her. We went on literally...possibly did four, separate eight-hour classes for law enforcement, we ended up seeing I don't remember the full number, but it was probably about 500 different law enforcement officers to help teach them what trauma looks like and better techniques for dealing with trauma and better techniques for talking to victims who are suffering from trauma.

SHELBY

And so, we're able to kind of be that go between, you know, we'll talk to the victim, and we can kind of explain things, and if for whatever reason there's not enough evidence to move forward, we can help explain that to them, but that doesn't mean that it didn't happen. And we always tell them that the fact that a case can't be made, does not mean that you were not victimized and you're not a survivor.

GREG

And we were getting invaluable instruction. The partnership was highly successful. I mean, all the detectives became comfortable with the therapists and vice versa. And in exchange, I would go over to The Women's Center one or two days a month and spend an entire day, and I would be available to any victim coming into the center that wanted to maybe ask a cop or a detective a particular question. Oftentimes I would find myself in sort of a therapy session or brought into a therapy session where they, the victim and the therapist were, you know, conducting their business. And I would answer questions and, and I think it was very beneficial because, you know, these victims oftentimes in therapy will question why detectives did or didn't do something and having that resource available...The Women's Center would say, "Hey, we have a detective here right now. Do you want to talk to them?"

SHELBY

So, I put a call in...and I explained the situation, and within 10 minutes, The Women's Center team was down here at our office... meeting with myself and the team of investigators from the other county and they were explaining to them what couldn't be released based on the victim's consensual release of information. So not only were they able to educate the law enforcement from another county about kind of what our rules are as far as confidentiality, but then I was able to immediately get the victim set up with services that they continued with The Women's Center for well over a year, I believe, and it's my understanding that they came out with a very successful—completed, those services. So, point of that is they're there when I need them. At the, an instant, I mean I feel like I could call in the middle of the night and get somebody and say, "I need you to meet me here, I have a unique situation."

GREG

And so, we went in and, she lived in the home with her younger brother and her parents. Well, you know, we told the parents why we were there, obviously they were mortified and very emotional, but not only because we were telling them their daughter might be victimized, but they recounted the story on about the date and time in question. And we knew when this happened because of photographs were time and date stamped, they said that their child, the daughter, ran into the room in the middle of the night and said that a bad man had been in her room. They, the dad got up and searched the home. There was nothing out of place. And they came to a conclusion that most parents probably would have in that case, they believed she had a nightmare. And so, they convinced her or continued to tell her that “No, honey, you just had a bad dream.” And they weren’t bad parents. They just believed that she had a bad dream. Well, she slept with her parents for about a week. They allowed that, and ultimately, they sent her back to her room, and Mom discovered that she was after that was sleeping under the bed. So, that child had, you know, each time she went to bed at night, she would crawl under the bed to sleep because she was afraid the bad man was going to come back. So here we are now telling the parents, “Oh no, there was really a bad man in her bedroom, and we know who it, was”...The only thing that he asked me, and he asked it over and over, or he made a statement, you have to help my daughter. That’s what he was concerned about. So, it was, that was very impactful. We were able to refer him to resources, probably Alliance for Children and The Women’s Center stepped in at that point. The Women’s Center was already fully engaged with the adult victims we had. So anyway, that was a, a very impactful moment. Not only were we relieved to find this child but didn’t hear about the circumstances that she had endured. And then the dad begging me for help for that...for his child. It was something I’ll never forget.

KIM

Obviously, it's not been a secret that our intimate partner cases are cases that involve family violence between intimate partners, and we've never seen a more dangerous phenomenon than the pandemic when it comes to those cases. Right now, I believe the last time I looked at the numbers, and I'm bad at quoting numbers, but about half of our capital murders right now involve family violence. And that's, that's an insane number. Family violence and child abuse and violence against women, such as adult sexual assault, has been dramatically affected by the pandemic, because oftentimes the person that's hurting you, you're now locked in with. And like kids can't report to their teachers, kids can't report to their camp counselors, you know, they're not in those positions. So that's happening to kids. Women are in situations where they're locked in, they're locked in the home, but they're with their kids, their husband, sometimes there's job issues. Sometimes there's money issues. There's all sorts of stuff going on that keeps people in that same house. They may not have an opportunity to go somewhere else. And so, we're just seeing the explosion of that.

SHELBY

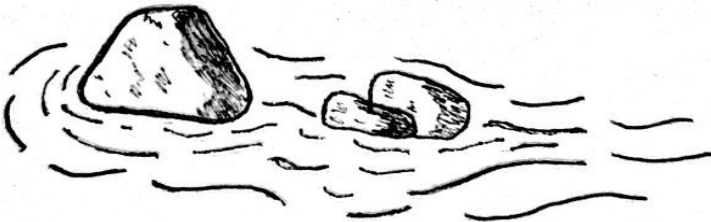
Yeah. We definitely saw a rise in family violence offenses as a result. I mean people are having to stay at home, they're having to be quarantined, they're having to be around...there's really no escape. We also unfortunately saw a decrease in child sexual abuse, but that wasn't because it was not happening. We think it's because those outcries, they don't have a safe place to make those outcries. So if you have kids that are having to learn at home virtually and not going to school, or they're not going to a friend's house, or they're not going, you know, to soccer practice or something where they can...they can talk with somebody outside of home. There's not anybody for them to outcry to, so that's kind of a scary statistic that we've seen that we're, you know, kind of watching very closely.

CONNIE

So, I'm a little frustrated because I'm not going to get everything done. I come to the hospital, and of course that subsides when you get here, you know. And especially when you meet your victim, and you start talking to them and realizing that I have somebody here who's the exact same age as my youngest kid. And they're homeless. And they've been assaulted. They're on the streets. They have no family, they have nowhere to go. I have nowhere to discharge them. They want to go back to the street. It's Christmas Eve. And I think the hardest thing for me ever, was to discharge her and watch her walk down main street on Christmas with nobody to go to. And so, I didn't give another thought to not having that last present. And if I could say anything, I was humbled by that experience.

LORI

So, I'm really thankful to have the advocates at The Women's Center and have a whole team, you know, that is there to work with me and answer questions and take care of issues or maybe move somebody to the front of the line for counseling if, if that warrants it. And I feel like I can pick up the phone and, and call anybody there if I need something.



FRAN

I see us continuing to meet a need in the community. As those needs evolve, then we evolve. So you know our programs have expanded exponentially over the years. We started with employment, then we added our Rape Crisis and Victim Services. We added Pearls and our general counseling program four or five years ago, so as we see needs in a community, we work very hard to expand our services to meet those needs, and I see that continuing. I don't see that being any different than it was forty years ago. When we see a need that meets our mission or fits our mission—and our mission is to empower and inspire women, men, and children to overcome violence, crisis, and poverty— as we see a need that fits within that mission, I just see us continuing to expand to meet those needs in the community. We are already almost outgrowing our building, so as we expand, I see us expanding even from a logistics standpoint, and I see us hopefully serving more and more men, women, and children in Tarrant County, continuing to transform those lives.

SARAH

I would say that movements need to be intersectional, and kind of what I mean is like being able to look at survivors holistically, and not only as a survivor of sexual assault, but also what other sorts of problems are facing them. Because what we see is a lot of times they're facing multiple forms of trauma. Not only are they experiencing and have experienced sexual assault, but they may also be experiencing homelessness, or they may also be experiencing, you know, drug addiction, and all of these different intersections that we have to approach holistically with the way that we provide services.



CHRISEE

For me, being in the Fundraising Department, there is always going to be that constant need to raise the dollars that we need to provide the services. Because from year to year, that landscape is always going to change. And you'll have donors who are going to be a one-time donor and donors who are long-time donors. There'll be new services that we need to seek additional funds for. So, I think it's just that piece knowing that we need to make sure we have the resources needed in order for us to fulfill the mission of the organization.

BECKA

Even though we're very fortunate that we have a variety of grants and brilliant grant writers that work here, there's never enough. We always are functioning from a place of needing more services for more survivors. And so, the clinical staff here when I started has nearly doubled from where I started to now, and we still function off wait lists, oftentimes. And so it's one of those things where it feels like even though we keep successfully looking and searching (and we always will) to find more resources and more funding, [it] doesn't seem like we ever have enough to meet everybody's needs exactly how we'd like to immediately. So that's probably one of the biggest frustrations.

CATHY

It's a challenge because we have a growing demand for our services. We have a growing staff, and we have a budget that is constrained by the money that we can raise. We do not charge for services. We do charge some program fees for counseling, some for student investment when they go into our employment training classes. But for the most part, we're funded by government grants, individuals, foundations, corporations, and our fundraising. We have two special events a year, so we're limited by those resources as to how much we can grow.



MIKE

I see us doing the same thing fifty years from now that we're doing now. The terminology may change. The therapist may no longer be doing "trauma informed" therapy. There may be something newer and better that they've learned—a newer way to deal with trauma. So it may not be called "trauma informed." It may be something new. The bigger and better. But the essential mission [will be] maintaining a rape crisis hotline, accompanying advocates on hospital accompaniments, therapy for survivors. Hopefully, we can keep the legal group here funded to do what we do. They're still gonna need that fifty years from now, because there's always going to be a population that's underserved. I just don't see these crimes going away.... I see us getting better at what we do.

MS. B

You know, life happens, and sometimes this is really not for everybody. It's really hard; sometimes it rips your heart out. And sometimes it's hard to recover from that, but there's so many things that we do here that it doesn't have to be the sexual assault part. It can be the recovery time, you know, it could be employment solutions where you're looking for a new life in a new way, a new job, and hopefully everything that we do here, and they've planned this out where it's the totality of a person that we look at, you know, and if you'll let us, as a survivor, we will help you walk through every aspect of your life until you can stand on your own. And I think that's really important, because it doesn't always happen.

MÓNICA

One of the beauties of The Women's Center is that I've seen so many people heal. I've seen so many people restore their lives and understand that what happened wasn't their fault and that it wasn't anything they did. It was completely somebody else's choice. But they also get to be like, "You know what? I do deserve a healthy life. I do deserve a healthy marriage." Regardless of any of the choices that I did or didn't make that led to this, they have healed. And that's just been beautiful to be a part of. That's probably why I've been here so long, because as horrible as the stories are, there's so much healing that happens here, too. There's so much restoration that happens, and that's hopeful. That's inspiring. And there are times where it's like, I just get to see a glimpse of that. It's... it's an honor.

FRAN

We're doing wonderful, wonderful things in the community. We are touching individual lives in such a transformational way. The story, for me, that sticks out—and I hear all of them, I hear a lot of success stories—there's a few that stick out to me. One of them is a man named Tom, who was probably in his mid-to-late eighties. Had been married to his wife for forty-five years, and she passed away. And Tom talked about his abject depression, the fact that he cried every day for four months, the fact that he could not function at all because of the loss of his wife. If you pulled out a picture of her, he said he couldn't even look at the picture of her, because he would just get so inconsolable. And after four months, his daughter came and said, "Dad, we've gotta do something. This is a really bad situation." And so, Tom reached out to some ex-colleagues that used to work at the Area Agency on Aging, and they told him about our Pearls Program. Our Pearls Program is a program where we actually go into the home of older adults, and we offer counseling and case management, to help them overcome depression and isolation. And so Tom reached out to our Pearls Program and started, and within just a few weeks began to make a transformation in his life, to where he could leave the house. He started going back to church, started reconnecting with old friends; and he said his life became purposeful again, that he really found joy in living again and wanted to continue on because at one point, he had given up on life. He was ready to commit suicide. And so, he said for him, there was no value that he could put on what Pearls had done for him and the transformation. And you know the quote that he always said was, "How do you put a value on a returned smile, on a lilt in your voice, on a spring in your step? Pearls changed my life." And so, for me, Tom is always, always the one that I think. He is the story. He is the picture of transformation that happens in this agency.

KIM

So on this..., obviously I've been a prosecutor for 20 years. I, I was kind of struggling about...there's been a lot, you know, there have been so many times that I have been moved... I've been moved, because we get to meet people in the very worst moments of their lives, and the bravery and the honesty and the forgiveness that I see in the courtroom, in 20 years, I've never...it never doesn't take my breath away, you know. Like it is unbelievable to watch families who have lost a loved one stand up and say they forgive the murderer, but it happens more than it doesn't. I don't, I don't know how to, you know...that is such a beautiful, powerful moment to watch victims of sexual assault come off the stand and tell me, and, and this also happens more than it doesn't, they say, "I'm glad I finally got to have my say." And I think that's such a powerful thing that we sometimes forget. Like victims on cases I have lost have still hugged me and thanked me, because it mattered to them that we, as a community, sexual assault community, stood up for her. And I never want to forget that. I never want to think about my, my job, my life, my career in terms of wins and losses. I always want to think of them in the human element. Like, did I leave this one person better for being there for them in that moment? Because I know when they come to me, something terrible would happen. I don't get to meet people where something terrible didn't happen, right? Like that's, that's not my job, but I don't have to make it more terrible. You know, I can't fix it. I can't—getting, putting someone away, even for life in prison, doesn't bring closure, it doesn't make it better, it doesn't heal you, it is a part of it, but it is not the part that changes the person. What changes the person is learning that people believe in them, that people will help them when they--so many victims feel like they, they're surprised that we want to, that we want to help them. Right?

ANA

[The Women's Center has] really helped me see things differently. I was really stressed and anxious when I came, and my therapist has really helped me, I guess, talk through the things that I feel, and it offers different perspectives of things that I probably didn't see before. So I just feel really welcomed here, and I feel like I've made a lot of progress, so I will definitely keep coming back...I've already just recommended people to the general counseling here. Just, you know, everyone here seems very helpful, knowledgeable. My son also comes here and sees a different therapist, and I mean, both of us just love coming for every session that we have. So, I would definitely recommend them to come just, just to be able to talk to someone and to work through life struggles, even if they're not a victim, but especially if they are. I mean, you know, there's, there are a lot of emotions that come with that, that skilled professionals can help you with.

VALERIE

Give The Women's Center a chance. At the end of the day, you might start thinking, gosh, maybe this is a good place for me. Maybe I do have hope after all. Maybe I can go out and I can be somebody now, you know, just, I mean, that's just how I feel. It gives you that hope every day. Every time you go to counseling gives you a little bit more hope every day that, well, I might be able to actually accomplish this today, as to where yesterday I couldn't have done it.

SHIVON

What keeps me coming back to The Women's Center?
Hope.



Therapist: Breath, deep breath.

Caro: Sorry.

Interviewer: You don't need to apologize.

Therapist: You're doing good.

Finding Hope at the Summit

GREG

There's a human being behind every one of those stories. So anyway, I think that we became much better at recognizing the human being behind the case, and being mindful of what that person needed to move on, because long after the criminal case is solved, and let's say the guy's in prison, there's still a person who has to deal with what happened.

SHELBY

I would tell victims probably that, that you're not alone. I mean, you...I do not tend to know what you're going through as a victim. I do not understand what you're going through as a victim; however, I know that there are people that can help work through those things with you. There are support groups, there are other survivors...there's clinical resources, and so you're not alone when it comes to getting resources. We will walk with them every step of the way until they're sick of us really, I mean, until they're like, "Okay thank you, we're good." Cuz it's hard and it's not that we're doing everything for them...they have gone through a traumatic event, which alters their brain and their thinking and their decision-making capabilities and so sometimes you need a little bit of extra help. I mean, you know, you have to put yourself in their shoes. And let's say you lose a loved one unexpectedly and now you have to sit down and plan a funeral...I mean you are going to be completely overwhelmed with that. Put yourself in the shoes of a victim: you were just sexually assaulted and do I need to report... do I really want everybody knowing what happened and what does this mean for me in the future? And so really, I would say just that you're not alone. We're going to get you to all the different places that you need to go to start doing your healing process.

VALERIE

When I first came in [to The Women's Center], I had been molested several times throughout the years starting at a very young age. That had messed me up real bad, but I kept that all, I kept it all inside of me, kept it all inside of me. I remember at the age of 13, my mom, she believed my stepdad over me and wanted to put me out. So that caused a lot of trauma, because I was like, how can my mom believe this guy and put me out just that fast? Like I was nothing, you know, that's how it made me feel. And so it grew to where I had a lot of resentment towards my sisters and my mom. There's a time I can remember my mom telling me she hated me because I looked like my dad, and that caused a lot of trauma, but seriously, she looked at me dead in my eyes and told me that. And it really, that really was like one of the main things that just really messed me up overall. And I ended up working the streets and stuff and just more trauma and more trauma kept coming on. And instead of trying to deal with it, or figuring out how to deal with it, I just kept sticking it further and further and further inside of me. And that's not the way to do it, because I was a hot mess when I finally did come in here. And I didn't have a voice, I didn't have nothing.

LORI

It will get better. Today may be the worst day of your life, but it will get better, and you don't have to do it by yourself. And I think that goes for all of us, even non-victims.

FRAN

I interviewed a man named Lee, who was a single father of two teenage kids, and after fourteen years got laid off from a telecommunications company, and ended up on welfare, losing his house, living with a family member. This was somebody who had a Master's degree, had a 401K, had money saved. He did everything that you're supposed to do, and basically lost it all. He was not able to find a job for, I think, fourteen months, and so, in the course of that fourteen months, really ended up hitting some hard times, and came to The Women's Center as a last resort. Because he, too, had the misconception that we did not help men. So when he came, he went through our skills training program and got a couple of certifications, and within two months, had another job—got a job with a very well-known technology firm and moved to California and was back to making the same amount of money that he had made getting laid off. So he talked about the transformation of never thinking that he would ever be on welfare, never thinking that that would ever happen to him, and the despair that he felt, and the depression, and the fact that every day you stay unemployed, it gets worse and worse and worse. And so, to hear his transformation and how victorious he felt, how much restoration he experienced going through that and coming through this program, and what he was able to take from it... that's the best part for me. To hear the clients, that their lives literally have changed, as a result of stepping in this building.

CONNIE

And you can decide with all the services and all the resources and all the support that we're going to give you, how we're going to move forward, you know, and giving them that positive affirmation that they can.

PAMMELLA

In fact I've talked about that with clients because they are nervous to tell. They get embarrassed, and I tell them first of all, I promise that this agency has been around so long that you're not going say anything they haven't heard before. But people think that their story is that different. But the truth of it is, it's usually the same story wrapped around. And I tell them, they wanna know do I have to talk about it? And I say, yes, but you can go at your own pace. You don't have to blurt it out all at once. Your therapist will be skilled. Because that's painful. It's hard to think, well I want to do better, but I'm going to have to talk about one of the worst experiences of my life, if not the worst, and maybe it's not an experience. Maybe it's a series, a lifestyle. Because that does happen to some. Sometimes it happens that they're victimized as children, and they're victimized again as an adult. You know it's heartbreaking. Give it a shot. If you don't feel comfortable, you tell the therapist, they'll slow down. Nobody is going to make you talk about something when you're not ready to talk about it. And just know that you're not alone, and the fact that they do it individually and in groups I think helps, because some things are easy to say individually, sometimes it's better in a group, because other people kind of encourage you, you know, to know, well, I'm really not alone in this experience. Just give it shot, especially since the services are free of charge, so you can't beat that. You can't deny it, especially since therapy out there is incredibly expensive, even if you go through insurance companies, they usually have a limit of what they'll pay. So it's an unbelievable blessing.

MS. B

And I also explain to them that this is not a pill that we can offer, that we're not trying to get them over it, which means never seeing the elephant in the room, but dealing with all of the traumas and dealing with the triggers and that going through counseling is like defusing a bomb. You know, you have to go in, and you really have to work on that thing, and it's painful, but when it's over that's one less trigger to set you off.

OCTAVIA

If I could offer [survivors] hope...It's hard, but it gets better. It doesn't completely erase your experience and things like that. But you...when you're going through, you know, your situation, it seems, like, real dark, but once you're able to talk about it, get it out and things like that, it gets better. It used to be really, really overwhelming for me. Like, like almost crippling, and now I'm just like, you know, as easy as I can freely talk, talk right now, just a few years ago, even just two years ago, I couldn't do that. And so, the hope would just be, you know, that it gets better.

CARO

I grew up in a family...I grew up in a family where incest and rape and domestic violence were the normal. And so just having that reality shift and re-seeing my relationships with not only men that I had known when I was an adult, but men I had known when I was a child, that was a pivotal moment for me. And that is also one of the reasons why I continued coming to therapy. Maya Angelou says that, "When you know better, you do better." And I discovered that I didn't know a whole lot that I thought I knew, and I really wanted to do better and be better and live recovery for my kids, because they had seen the mess, and I wanted them to see something different.

CHARLA

I guess the biggest misconception is, through counseling, I'm starting to realize that it wasn't my fault. That I've always thought it was my fault, even though I have no idea why I thought that, but I'm finally beginning to realize that it wasn't.

CARO

So that is the kind of thing that people with PTSD, that we deal with, because it comes from a trigger that you may not know is there. And so sounds, smells, words, songs...anything can trigger you. And like with people with regular PTSD, they, for the most part, from my understanding, is they went to war, they had a car accident, they had a hurricane, they know where it's coming from. And a lot of times we don't, because we're victims of something that we don't remember, or we were too young, or we don't even know that it was trauma to start with. So that has dramatically improved. I have a much greater tolerance for stress triggers or emotional pain. So what would happen is I have this thing called dissociation. And so my emotions shut off, and I used to live with my emotions shut off. And then, every once in a while, I might feel a thing or two.

TABITHA

[W]e have four boys. So the same thing happened to two of 'em that happened, you know, like it's, it's very similar. So one of 'em could take it and just be like, okay. And he did the play therapy and everything, and he seems fine, like he's like, I'm okay. And then the other kid is still like, I don't understand why didn't my birth mom choose me and why is she still...and he just, he's struggling more than the other one, when the other one just kind of accepted it, like this is the way that it is, okay, and then we have another one who just does not accept it... (Tabitha 18) And so the first phrasing we learned, you know, was like calm yourself by yourself. And I'm like, that's just a joke because my son's just gonna scream and keep throwing things, but okay, we'll do it. And like the first time we did it, we just kept saying it, you don't say anything else, that's all you say. And then he just stops and looks at me and he's like, what? I'm like, you have to calm yourself by yourself. And he's like, oh, and I was like, I don't know how that worked. Or the first time we gave options, would you like to walk up the stairs by yourself, or would you like me to hold your hand? And every time before bed, he would

TABITHA CONT.

scream for like 30 minutes trying to drag him up the stairs. And the first time we did this, and he's like, I'll hold your hand. And then he just went up the stairs. We literally were looking at each other. We were like, I can't believe this is working. But if you don't do the steps, it's not gonna work. Cause I have friends that have adopted children, same issue, you know, backstory, and she's like, I just, I can't control them. I can't do this. It's just insane. I'm like, cuz if you don't do the steps, then it's not gonna work. So do the steps, whether it's for yourself or for your children, you know what I mean? If you're at The Women's Center needing healing, or you're at The Women's Center because your children need healing, do the steps that they say.

BECKA

This child came to us initially very hesitant and very scared and very withdrawn. And the expert play therapists that we have here just met him where he was at, and let him be in charge, and let him figure out that he could be safe here. And so we watched this child who started not even feeling safe having the door to the playroom closed when he would come in for session, to weeks later having the door closed. And I knew that was his choice when he felt safe, and when he started, he came here, and the play therapist told him, you know, all the toys in this room, you can use them in any way you'd like.... We have a variety of toys, even things that most playrooms don't typically have. And he honed in on the dinosaurs. A bunch of plastic, scary-looking dinosaurs. And he did not like those. And every week he came, one by one, he'd remove all the dinosaurs from the playroom, and he'd set them out in the hall away from his play



BECKA CONT.

space, and then he'd go and have his session, and everything was safe and fine. And then I knew he was there, because the playroom was right across from my office. And slowly but surely, I watched the stack of dinosaurs get smaller and smaller and smaller, until one week. I knew he was there, and there wasn't a dinosaur in the hallway, and the door was closed to the playroom. And so in play therapy language, that told us he no longer felt like he had to remove the scary things in order to be safe. He was able to be safe in his play therapy space, and he had processed some of his feelings with his play therapist. And so that was one of my favorite stories. Still is, even though it was years ago, because I think it shows that you don't have to have words to heal from these horrible things. And sometimes there aren't even words for survivors to be able to use, but that doesn't matter. Healing is still possible. And I know this cause we watch it every day, and it's a great privilege.

HEATHER

That's compassion. That's meeting someone where they're at, you know, whatever their circumstances are, whatever their belief system is, whatever their needs are, and I always try to tell my victims that, you know, I'm just here for you. The cops are gonna need you to give a statement, the same nurse is going to need you to give a statement. I don't need anything from you; I'm just here to support you, whatever that looks like. If you want to lay your head down and go to sleep, we don't need to talk. If you want to unload your burdens on me, I'm here to talk. Whatever it looks like. I'm here for you.

TABITHA

I was really hard on myself at the beginning. And so now I think I give a little bit more grace to them and to me, and I did not compromise ever, like it was my way or no way. And so I learned that I don't have to be in control. That's not what raising kids is about. It's not about being in control. It's about learning to work together.

VALERIE

Well, if y'all would've been asking me these questions probably about six months ago, I probably would've been like, you know, I can't do this. I can't do it. I can't. I still couldn't have done it six months ago. I mean, it took me a while, a long time, but, I still have my moments, but nothing compared...I can sleep at night now. Before I had a hard time sleeping, and I had real bad nightmares about some of the things that men did to me. My daughter had to live through some things. She had nightmares about some of the things that men had did to me. So it put a toll on my daughter as well. So six months ago, I probably couldn't have done what I'm doing right now. Being able to be in here talking to y'all like I am and be okay with it without crying, without breaking down or anything like that. So I know with a fact that The Women's Center is the best place or the best thing that ever could happened to me in my life. Honestly it is. And I would recommend The Women's Center to anybody: men, children, women, it doesn't matter. Cuz they're there for you...I learned how to set healthy boundaries. I learned that I do have a voice and that I'm able to speak up for myself without feeling some type of way, that I can say no. And it's okay today to do that. And I've seen a big change in myself today, a drastic change, because like I said a minute ago, when I first came here, I was broken completely. And today it's... if it wasn't for my therapist, I don't even think I would be where I'm at right now. Honestly, they, The Women's Center, they try to figure out what's going on with you so they can help you and work through what avenues they need to work through with you. And that's what I love about The Women's Center, because they do care and they are there for you.

CARO

In January of 2015 or December of 2015, I had attempted suicide a couple of times and I was in crisis...So I was in crisis and I was an alcoholic still, still I'm an alcoholic today, a recovering alcoholic. And I had gotten to the place where I had figured out that I knew nothing about the way life really worked, but I didn't know how to change that. And so I called the crisis hotline that The Women's Center has. And they interviewed me over the phone, and because of the state that I was in and I was coming out of a psychotic break, they bumped me and I got a therapist. And so that's why I decided to come, because I was at the end of everything that I understood.

KIM

They've given up on themselves in ways that they think that we're going to. And so when we don't, it's inspiring to watch women learn to trust themselves in the process and trust us. And it's just, it's such a beautiful, beautiful human story that I wouldn't be a lawyer if there wasn't a human story to it... The case that, and I will never forget it, it was a little girl. She wasn't little by the time I tried the case, but, she had been sexually assaulted by her foster dad in foster care. And so she was, she...actually, the case, because of reasons not important except that the case got very old by the time I had the case. And so, you know, it happened to her when she was 15, but we didn't end up trying the case till she was 18, almost 19. And I remember when I got the case, and I met with her the first time, you know, she told me, "I'm not doing this for myself, I'm doing this because I can't ever know that he's a foster dad. You know, like I can't, I can't know that can happen again." And I thought, "Okay, well, you know, that's so brave, but this is- you know, this still happened to you." Like it's--and she just never talked about how it happened to her. There was always like, "I've got to make sure this doesn't happen to someone else."

JASMINE

I want clients to know that we're here and that this is a place that's about hope and healing and that the people who are here care about them—that we believe that the individual person is the best driver of their own life and their own change. And so this is about them and their journey and their hope. I want people to know that there are stories from the other side, as I was describing, that people heal from tragedy, and people overcome the lowest times in their life. I think if there was another message from The Women's Center that I have gained, [it] is that someone can have the worst possible story—just an unbelievably terrible story about what they experienced—but they can heal. That is the beauty of human beings and our processes, and the power of our brains is that with the right supports and the right messaging, people can heal from tragedy and go on to live productive lives and to fulfill dreams. And, and there are times that—I know personally, there's been times in my life that I couldn't see the other side of something. And so I want clients to know that, that other side exists and that the services that we have here can help them on their journey towards that new beginning. I want them to know that we searched the evidence that works. I want them to know that we want to serve everyone who lives in Tarrant County who needs services in our mission area, so that we are a place that is open to people from different spiritual backgrounds, from different lifestyle backgrounds, that this is a home for them. As part of that feminist ideal, this women-centered idea, that everyone has value and that everyone's story is a piece of that long story.



CARO

The things that I've been sharing with you today, a year ago, two years ago, I could have sat here and told you my whole life story and not shed a tear. So it is painful on some level, but to have things back that I never thought were possible has been amazing. And advice? You get out of yourself what you're willing to put in. And a lot of what happens to us, a lot, is that we love our kids or we love our friends or we love our parents, but we don't love ourselves, because things have told us that we're not lovable. And so, loving yourself enough to give yourself this is really important. And that you do, you get out so much more than you put in. And even just having a sacred space where, you know that nothing you say, within reason... is not gonna be repeated. It's the safeness of a voice and an ear and someone that you know is unbiased and wanting to help you. If you've never had that, it's life changing.

SHIVON

You have been a light in your own darkness, or you wouldn't be a survivor, you would be a victim. Remember when you cover a flame, it smothers. Let nothing, nothing smother yours. Be a light, and together we can light up the world.

KATHARINE

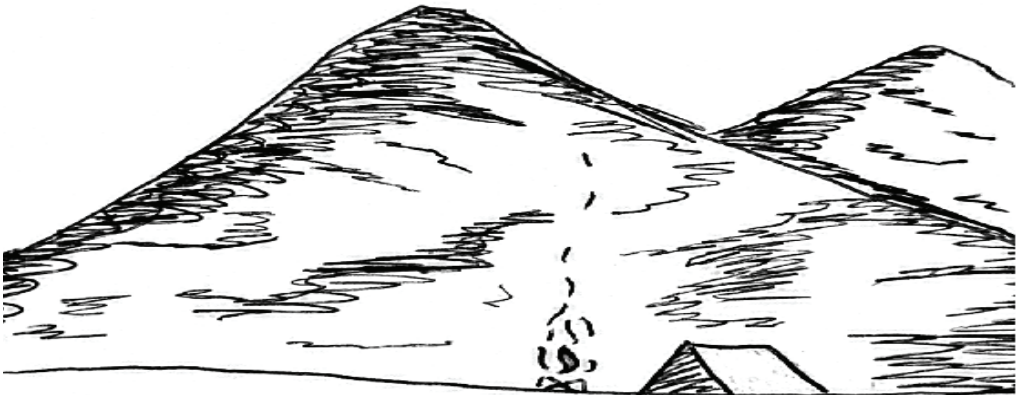
The harder it's gonna be to start kind of getting your neuro pathways back to a healthy and safe place, the harder it's gonna be for you to start seeing your world through a safe lens. And so, because we know that 65% of just sexual assault--we're not even talking about other types of trauma, right-- experience more than one type. We know there's so many people in our community that have this complex trauma and that means there's so many people dealing with so many hard issues. And we need to learn to be more trauma-informed.

CARO

If what happened to you didn't kill you, this won't either. Like I had a friend, and she had a broken ankle and she didn't go to the doctor and her ankle healed, broken. So in order for them to fix that, she was in so much pain, they had to re-break her ankle. So it's like having something that healed wrong, and you have to go through the pain of breaking it. But the benefits of that are so much greater than the pain you go through with the re-breaking and the pain you live in if you don't do the work... So for my first couple of years, I really just worked on your basic life coping skills and how to deal with, you know, how to deal with life. And like I said, cognitive stuff. And then I started doing trauma therapy a year and two months ago. So trauma therapy is completely different than cognitive. And so, although I did make progress before, I didn't have significant healing. I made progress in how I function in life, but I didn't have significant healing from the past trauma... It is very frightening to consider adding more pain, but the benefits far outweigh the discomfort.

SHIVON

Whenever I feared getting help, it was because I didn't wanna give up control of the one thing that I have control of, which was, well, what I thought I had control of, y'all, just being honest, which is my emotions. Y'all, I have no control of my emotions at all. Thank goodness for therapy. And a misconception that I would hope to clear up, is that, that freedom that you feel from what you think is gonna hurt you, is what heals you.



KATHARINE

So what keeps coming to mind to me is faith. And I don't necessarily mean that you have to subscribe to any religion, but the belief that there is help out there and to have faith that just because you talk to one person and they don't believe you, doesn't mean there's someone else. So have faith and keep telling your story--you're going to reach someone, you know, have faith that the people who need to hear it are going to hear it. If you subscribe to a religion, having faith that there is a higher power to help you through it. If you don't, having faith that there's a community that will support you, because it does. It is, it is so hard, but it does get better. We see people heal from trauma all the time. It is not uncommon, you know, the majority of our clients are people in their twenties, thirties, forties, and something happened to them so long ago, but they're just now having that ability, whether it's transportation, maybe they finally moved to a place that has free counseling. Maybe they just have been worried to talk about it, but they're finally coming in. So they've like carried this for years and years and years. But I think that they hold on that it will get better, it will get better, it will get better. That faith can help keep people going. And then I just think for people who are not survivors, I know we say this so much at The Women's Center, but it is just about believing people and remembering that and taking yourself out of it. So just because your experience isn't the same as my experience doesn't mean it didn't happen, right? Just because you didn't react the same way you reacted or I reacted about something, doesn't mean it didn't happen, right? So we just need to believe people where they are. We don't need to be placing our judgements. And I think when we can put those things aside, it can make things a lot more hopeful. But then again, at The Women's Center, we always say, well, hope is hope, you know, have that hope, and we'll help you find it if you can.

SHIVON

For me, [speaking to you today] was a huge opportunity to bridge the gap between my fears and my new success story. And I'd like to share a poem with you guys if that's okay. It's really deep. I speak in analogy a lot. So when I say it's deep, I don't know how everyone else feels it, but for me, it's deep...I do wanna point out real quick, just before I start the poem, the power of three.

3:33AM – again January 9, 2022

I can't sleep, I can't even truly think.

All the words inside my head are jumbled, like passengers on a ship about to sink.

Sink. Dishes. Damn.

Another day, another undone.

I wish I felt anything, but numb.

I want to feel so that I may begin to heal.

I'm trapped, the walls are closing in, I can't really breathe but I vaguely recall how to swim.

Good. I won't drown.

Maybe.

Please, save me!!!!

I don't know who I can count on, I can count pretty high but each one I thought I could count on, now lives in the sky.

I am so afraid. Afraid of leaving scars like my own. I don't want that to be the seeds I sow!

I want out of my head, I'm so afraid I'll wind up dead.

Before I can escape, I don't need a superhero with a cape, I need a will and a way to get past all the rape.

Not the way you think. Well, some of what you think, too. You see these intrusive thoughts did not receive my consent, it was NEVER my intent, to allow these things to keep playing on a loop.

I lost myself. I'm somewhere inside. Inside my own mind.

Occupying places I don't belong in.

Rent so late I'll forever be fined.

I am so SORRY!!! To the ones I've loved and done wrong, to myself for not letting go for so long.

CHARLA

I guess I just keep going back to, you know, that you are stronger than you think you are, cuz that's a big one for me, and that it's not your fault, no matter what anybody says.

SHIVON

Previously, I did not understand self-care. When I say that, y'all, I literally had no idea. I enjoy painting. I enjoy photography. I enjoy outdoors, but none of that healed me. None of that made me feel like I was releasing enough of me to feel me again, if that makes any sense to anybody other than me. So recently, and most helpful on my journey of self-discovery and healing, I study the Bible and the meaning of its scriptures for my life.

CARO

If I can, I try to maybe identify [what] the trigger was. And if I can't, which happens, I learned about this stuff called bilateral stimulation, and I thought it was kind of dumb when I first heard about it. But if you go on YouTube and you look at what it is, it's a scientific thing. And it basically is noise or sounds at different frequencies going from the left side, right side of your brain. And it works. I don't know how, I don't know how to explain it, but it does. And I have headphones that have flat panels on 'em, and if I put that on, I fall asleep within minutes; it's almost like I took an Ambien or something. And for someone who has trouble sleeping, that's pretty fantastic. So I listen to that. I have this thing, it's a spot right here [points to sternum]. And I don't know, [my therapist] can tell you the science of it, I can't, but if I look at that spot, it kind of helps me calm down and sort of come into touch with where I'm at and keep myself from disassociating.

KELLY

Me personally, one thing I like to do is cook. I particularly like barbecue, so I'll do that a lot. And that kind of helps me take my mind off the situation. And then, for me personally, if I have like a real stressful case or things just seem to be getting bad, I think a couple of things: one, you have to kind of acknowledge it, be aware of it. And then, two, what I like is- is to be by myself. I need just some time by myself to process a case.

KATHARINE

Let me tell you about this one client that she just embodies the definition I think of hope. I had a client who was sexually assaulted in her marriage and had two kids and was seemingly just kind of living like the perfect life. You know, the two kids, the two- story house...both she and her husband had like the perfect jobs. And she was sexually assaulted, came in, I don't even remember, I think a friend made her come in. I can't even remember exactly how it happened. And she gained the courage to finally leave that marriage while they were separated. He broke into the house and sexually assaulted her again, tried to take the kids away. She was in a community that doesn't talk about this, and her parents didn't even wanna believe her that this was happening. But she just decided, "I'm just gonna keep pressing charges. I'm gonna press charges." So she was pressing charges. He was in jail, awaiting trial, and his family would stalk her. They would just be sitting in the parking lot of her job. They'd have one follow her to her job and the other would sit in the parking lot and just real, like, intimidating tactics. And this went on for two years. I saw her for two years. Finally it ended up going to a plea deal and was pled out. But when she gave her victim impact statement, you know, we had, advocates there and people there to support her, of course, but he also had his family there. And they were just calling her, like screaming and talking about calling her every name in the book, like, what a horrible person. They had to be escorted out of the courtroom. They could no longer stay for it. He served his time in jail, and she and I saw each other for a while longer. And then about six months, maybe after we finished counseling, she started... How did she get involved with them? Oh, I think she and I had just kind of talked about how can you ever share your story, because that was really important to her because she was just from a community that doesn't talk about this and because she just felt so silenced. So I had given her some information for TCFV, the Texas Council on Family Violence, and she had reached out to them. Well, she was chosen then as their speaker for Advocacy Day. So she went and I went with her and we had some advocates support her, too. And she walked to the Capitol and then she, in front of hundreds of people, stood up at the Capitol and on a microphone, told her whole story. And I just love that so much, because two years, two and a half years, is not a long time for her to go from being in an abusive relationship that she just felt she could not ever leave to then it getting worse and worse and worse to then now she's like speaking at the Capitol. And I just think that is so, I don't know, it's just so empowering to see other people have that kind of change.

TIM

A lot of people just want to know that you care. In ministry we call it the power of presence. Which means sometimes even if a person is hurting...sometimes you may not have exactly what to say. And sometimes when people are going through trauma, and are going through grief, if you were there with them, if you ask them later on, "What did Tim say to you today that gave you encouragement? What did he say to you?" They say, "I don't remember what he said; I just remember that he was there."

KIM

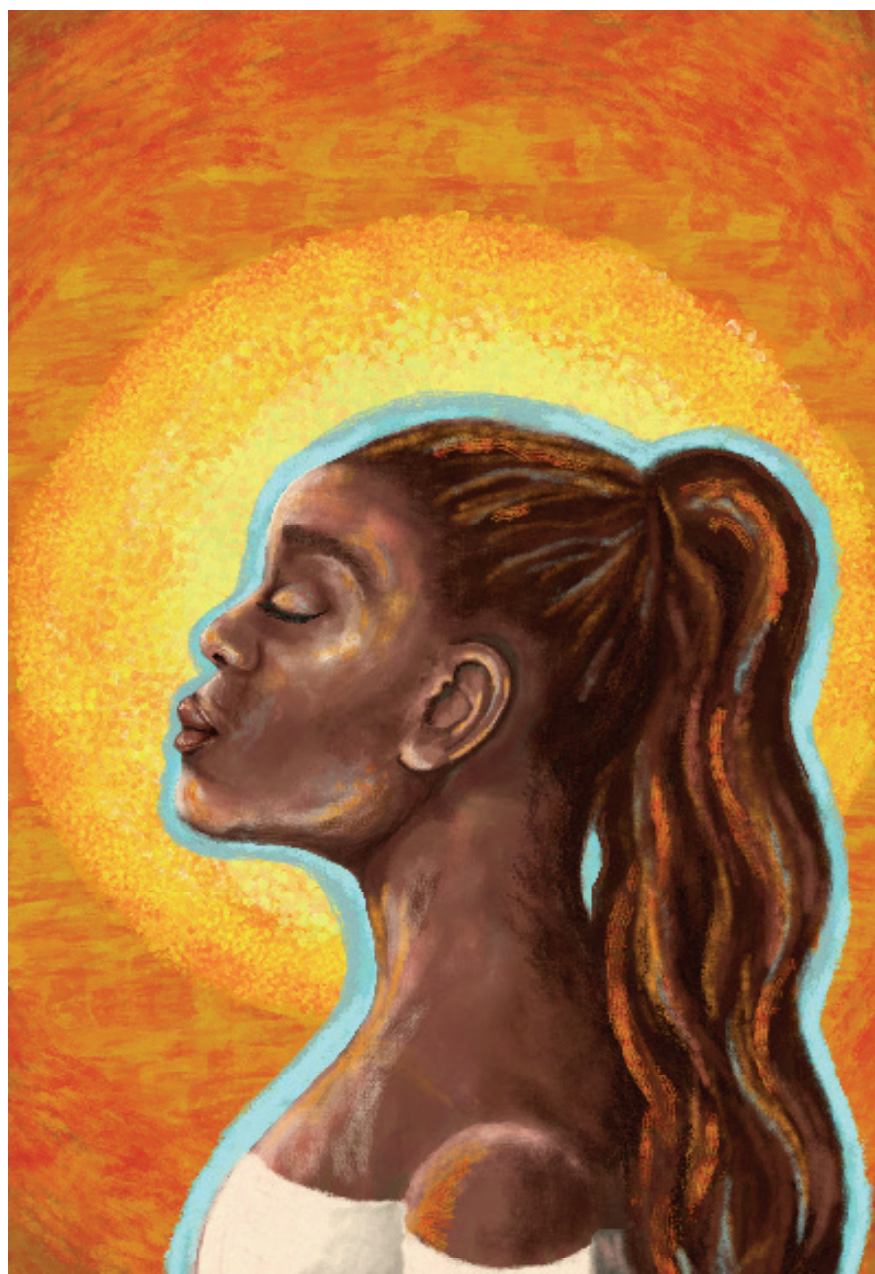
It's, it's the victims, they're powerful...I'm not kidding. I mean, I have seen...I have seen all kinds of things in my life, but I've never seen anything braver than someone walking up to that stand.

CHARLA

[I've learned] that I'm a lot stronger than I thought I was...and that I have more power than I thought I ever would have, and I'm feeling a lot better.

SHIVON

Someone loved my soul enough to give me therapy and love the parts of me, or show me love. Love isn't always what we just know as a, a relation. You know, it's just not. And when we have love surrounding us all the time, even if we don't feel it around us, if we give it, it's over-empowering...You guys have no idea what you just did for my life by letting me share [my story]. I see that that touched you. And I hope that everything that I say today, you find some sort of healing or want to heal or faith in healing from it. Because healing is so real and so powerful.





RESOURCES

The Women's Center

Phone Number: 817-927-4040

Address: 1723 Hemphill St D, Fort Worth, TX 76110

John Peter Smith (JPS) Hospital

24/7 Emergency Department Phone Number:

817-702-8783

Address: 1500 S. Main Street, Fort Worth, TX 76104

National Domestic Violence Hotline

Phone Number: 800-799-7233

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

Call or text 988

National Human Trafficking Hotline

888-373-7888

or Text BeFree SMS 233733

Texas Christian University Title IX CARE

Leah Carnahan

Phone: 817-257-5225

Email: l.carnahan@tcu.edu

Website with Additional Resources: care.tcu.edu
(For TCU Students) TCU 24/7 Counseling Helpline -
817-257-SAFE (7233)

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Corinne Green
Junior BFA Graphic Design
Cover Art

After reading past chapbooks with “Hope Starts Here” in mind, I wanted to create cover art depicting the duality of painful trauma and hope within a woman who has experienced sexual assault or abuse. While darkness seems to encroach and enfold her, hope and strength radiate from within; a source of light that can never be stripped away. The complexity of healing from trauma is shown through the juxtaposition of somber, blue hues with a warm glow. Healing is a difficult, but beautiful process, and I hoped to convey that journey through layers of rich texture and color. This is similar to how the women in the chapbook turn to the art of poetry and writing to cope and express themselves, ultimately drawing beauty out from the depths of pain.

Half of the subject’s face emerges from the darkness, representing her resolve to open up to the world– to step into the light and speak about the traumatic experiences that have weighed her down. Striped bits are erased from her, signifying the pieces of herself she feels she has lost at the hands of others. However, her hopeful light and silent strength fill in the gaps, slowly but surely restoring her.

Ellie Gonyea
Junior BFA Graphic Design
p. 65 and Honorable Mention for Cover Art

I sought to represent the complex, and often conflicting, emotions that survivors of trauma often experience. With “Hope Starts Here” as the theme, I wanted to convey the message that despite the darkness and pain of past experiences, there is always the possibility of hope for a better future.

The use of color and light played a central role in the creation of this piece. Blue tones were chosen to represent the sadness and heaviness of grief, while bright oranges and yellows were chosen to represent the hope and potential for healing and growth.

The woman in the artwork is depicted with a clear and radiating strength. Her chin is raised in a way that communicates a quiet but powerful resilience, and the light and color that illuminate her convey an unbreakable spirit. Ultimately, this artwork is a celebration of hope and resilience in the face of adversity.

I [was] also was honored to be able to create something for the Women’s Center of Tarrant County. The work they do is incredibly important, and I was glad to assist them in some form.

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