

Conversations With a Pedophile

In the interest of our children

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DEDICATION

To my children Benjamin and Alixandra,
I am blessed to be your mother.

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PREFACE

A Personal Note

It's important to know that the typical pedophile is not the stereotypical "stranger in the bushes," wearing a trench coat and offering candy. The typical child molester is your neighbor, your clergyman, the local scoutmaster, your babysitter; he or she may even be your friend or your relative. The pedophile hides in plain sight—goes to work, attends church services, and participates in community activities. Providing, of course, those activities give him or her access to your kids.

There are few crimes more horrifying to contemplate than the sexual assault of a child. Any mention of the subject awakens feelings of repulsion, rage, fear, and disbelief. We all share those feelings. Even among criminal offenders, the child molester is considered a sewer rat in the social hierarchy. Among parents, the need to protect children from sexual abusers has led to legislation such as Megan's Law. Among educators, awareness of childhood sexual abuse has spawned many controversial programs that attempt to educate the very young about "good touching" and "bad touching."

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Yet as a society, our attitudes toward childhood sexual abuse warrant scrutiny. Why don't we feel as great a need to warn our communities as when a murderer or rapist is released from prison? As much as we may want to protect our children from sexual abuse—and for all our good intentions—the fact is that most of us are ignorant of how and why such crimes come about. Though recent decades have seen breakthroughs in contemporary attitudes about acceptable sexual conduct, most people still regard pedophilia as a behavioral phenomenon too horrific to attempt to understand.

Unless the unimaginable happens to someone they know. Until then, childhood sexual abuse is something that, as parents and as a concerned society, we are content to keep at arm's length. Sexual abuse is something we want desperately to believe happens only to somebody else—to someone else's daughter, or the neighbor's boy, or the family down the street. We teach our kids not to talk to strangers, and believe that this is enough to keep them safe. Yet to believe that abuse only happens at the hands of "strangers" is to put your children at grave risk.

I know, because as a music therapist I have worked with child molesters and the abused for much of my career. I know, because I was a victim of childhood sexual abuse.

As much as we comfort ourselves with the notion that children are better protected in today's society than ever before, they are not. Even though modern parenting methods call for greater involvement in our children's activities, increased adult supervision, and improved family communication, the incidence of childhood sexual abuse is on the rise.

We cannot afford to ignore the truth any longer. Current estimates of the incidence of sexual abuse of girls range from 25 percent to 38 percent. The abuse of boys is considered by

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researchers to be consistently underreported; some have estimated it to be as high as 17 — 25 percent. Many studies use figures that only reflect reported cases. The FBI and the Justice Department have determined that only one in ten cases is actually reported, while other researchers postulate that approximately one-third of all abuse victims keep secret their sexual abuse and carry a terrible psychological legacy into adulthood. Most importantly, 75 percent to 95 percent of the offenders, regardless of the victim's sex, *are known by and may be related to the child.*

Since sexual abuse typically occurs at the hands of a known, trusted individual, it introduces a sense of danger in what ought to be a child's safe world. This invasion is the most damaging aspect of abuse because it destroys the child's trust in his or her own feelings and instincts. This results in a sense of alienation, a feeling of "differentness." The child who feels like a stranger to himself also loses confidence, ability to make ordinary social contact, and happy childhood memories. This child has an incapacity to play, to learn, and to accept normal, loving nurturing. People with a history of abuse are plagued by anxiety and depression well into adulthood because they generally believe that events are beyond their control. Worse still, they can go on to abuse others when they grow up.

Clearly, the pedophile must be stopped, but we can't stop what we don't understand. Knowing that a real relationship exists between the victim and the offender is essential to understanding the child molester. Sexuality is commonly thought to be the major ingredient of this relationship. Actually the dominant element is control.

As a child, I never understood the nature of the victim-abuser relationship, though I had been regularly and system-

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atically abused by my father and paternal grandfather. I never understood how I was selected as a victim or why I kept my terrible secret for so long. It wasn't until I began the work with the man whom I call "Alan" in these pages that I began to be liberated from the darkness surrounding the awful reality of my past. He, more than anyone else I had ever encountered in my work, helped me finally understand the planning and methods of the child molester, and the carefully controlled web of lies he used to ensnare hundreds of innocent children.

This book is the story of a unique relationship. I originally served as Alan's music therapist after he was incarcerated, but it was through our subsequent correspondence, spanning an entire decade, that he shared with me the insights that he gained as a result of our work together. Finally, getting inside the mind of an offender and understanding his madness was crucial to my coming to terms with having been a victim. The result has been a profoundly healing experience.

In telling the story of the incredible dynamic between us, I hope to provide the reader access to this kind of understanding in a way that is not only informative but also deeply affecting. As much as most people may fear the pedophile, they know almost nothing about the inner workings of his mind. There has never been a comprehensive study of the motivations and psychology of a child molester. As a society, we know that such people exist, but we do not understand why.

This book seeks to address that deficit.

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There are three people whose lives this book would not have been possible without. There are obstacles, who has helped me overcome them, who has given me the creativity. My main motivation, a level of importance, my husband, my prince, my husband, my enchanted life. It is in order to share our lives.

There are also people who have helped me. You I am eternally grateful to, friend, Lisa Bielawa. And to Alan X.—I appreciate your honesty and hope that this rare illumination into pedophilia from our conversations will help protect children in the future, a goal which I know we share.