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PERSPECTIVE OPINION INDEPTH

# Perspective: I survived abuse. I worked for the church's help line. The AP story broke my heart

No child should have to suffer what those sisters went through. Heroes are working to help stop this sickening abuse

By Kate Taylor Lauck

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Michelle Budge, Deseret News | [Purchase Photo](#)

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*Editor's note: Those who are victims of sexual violence can find resources by calling the Rape and Sexual Assault Crisis Line at [1-888-421-1100](tel:1-888-421-1100) or the 24-hour crisis and information hotline at [801-467-7273](tel:801-467-7273).*

I felt a sick knot in my stomach.

A friend texted me an article from The Associated Press titled, “Seven years of sex abuse: How Mormon officials let it happen.” As I read the disturbing details, my eyes filled with tears and my heart absolutely shattered.

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No child should have to ever suffer through what the sisters described in the article suffered through. It's devastating every time I hear the stories of sex abuse survivors.

Even as I type and edit this article, I can't help but pause and weep.

You see, I'm not just a mother of young children and a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I'm also a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, much like that described in the article.

And what's more, I am an attorney, and I worked as part of the small group of lawyers tasked with assisting victims of abuse — on the very same church help line discussed in the AP article.

Because of my background, I read the article with a careful eye. I read from the perspective of an abuse survivor. And I also read from the perspective of this specialized group of attorneys and mental health professionals — my friends and former colleagues — who oversee the church's help line.

I can't speak to the specifics of the case discussed in The Associated Press article. I only

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I can speak to what I know.

And I know my former colleagues are diligent, competent, compassionate and deeply committed to the work of protecting kids from abuse. We were a small team so I know each attorney personally. We often reflected on how lucky we felt that we got to use our law degrees to rescue children and help victims.

To suggest that any attorney on the helpline is “hiding” abuse from law enforcement seems disingenuous or inaccurate. From my experience, it just wouldn’t happen. Not only is it illegal, it is immoral. The very fact that criminal charges have not been brought against anyone from the church is the first indication that the AP article may not have the complete story.

It’s critically important to stand up for survivors of sex abuse, and so I also know how important it is for each of us to strongly condemn the unspeakable horrors inflicted on too many children, especially the two sisters who were the subjects of The Associated Press’s reporting. What the girls suffered can never be justified.

Child abuse in any form is a tragedy. It is an especially depraved form of torture.

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I experienced sexual abuse as a small child at the hands of trusted adult family members. Much like the sisters described in the AP article, a significant part of my childhood involved sexual contact of some sort. I was repeatedly raped, beaten, burned and forced to consume my own human waste. And I was not even in kindergarten yet.

The abuse continued for many years.

I had bones broken that were never medically treated. Burns from cigarettes and stoves that festered and became so infected that I have permanently lost feeling in those parts of my body. A wooden cutting board was broken over my head, shattering part of my skull. Eventually I was also raped by men outside of my family in order to support a family member's drug addiction.

Though faded, my adult body still bears the physical scars of what I went through.

My heart will always carry scars.

I entered the foster care system at age 12. I bounced in and out of the system for the next couple of years until I was permanently removed at the age of 15. I lived with loving foster families until I graduated from high school. Because I was able to escape my violent childhood, I knew what a gift it was to escape.

I vowed that I would always do everything I could to protect vulnerable populations from exploitation and harm.

When I was 18, I read an account of Joseph Smith's first vision. I felt what I describe as a spiritual shockwave from heaven. A confirmation that what I was reading had actually taken place. That was the beginning of my love for the church into which I was baptized, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Moreover, my testimony in Jesus Christ's atonement helped me begin to heal. I started to understand that while the atonement covers all of my sins, it also covers all of the sins committed against me. This healing knowledge acted as a balm to my deep wounds and helped me understand that those who harmed me would be held accountable in the atonement.

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My suffering was not forgotten. My pain was no longer irreconcilable. Through the atonement, I could let go.

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Over the years, many have asked me how I was able to escape my abusive past and become a stable adult who seems “normal.” I credit my absolute dedication to getting an education as a way out of the life I was born into. I put all my efforts into attending college, where I had the most transformative experiences of my life. I could leave the small farming community I had grown up in and pursue my wildest dream yet: becoming an attorney.

After graduating from Weber State University, I moved to Washington, D.C., where I completed my master’s degree at the United States Naval War College and my juris doctorate at Georgetown Law. My career took me to Capitol Hill, the White House and the Pentagon.

I spent one summer during law school clerking for then-Chief Justice David Nuffer of the U.S. District Court of Utah. I assisted him on two child pornography cases that forever changed my legal understanding of child sexual exploitation.

I saw firsthand how seriously law enforcement takes child pornography, how ferociously perpetrators are prosecuted and how severely these criminals are punished. While the details surrounding the cases are disgusting and heinous, the hope given to survivors is heartening. I left that clerkship understanding that I could use my lived experience and the platform that having a law degree gave me to help other survivors begin their own healing journey.

I was given the chance a few years later when the unexpected death of my brother-in-law brought me home to Utah so that I could help care for my widowed sister and her young family. I knew Kirton McConkie was the law firm tasked with assisting the

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absolutely honored — to be hired to work on the help line from my position at the law firm.

I was doing exactly what I had set out to do: assisting victims and survivors of abuse to get the help they need and also reporting abuse to law enforcement. This may seem strange, but it's the truth: the experience on the help line was a testimony builder for me in the goodness of the church.

Behind the curtain, so to speak, the church was doing everything it could to get it right.

This is why the AP article was so hard to read for me. Those I worked with on the help line were uniformly advocates for victims of abuse, focused on helping those in need and complying with the law.

It simply broke my heart to read the AP's account of the disgusting abuse suffered by these innocent girls.

And this particular article was doubly hard, because it depicted one part of my identity as a child sexual abuse survivor while also misrepresenting another part of my identity as a lawyer who used to work on the church's help line.

There should be no stigma in helping abuse victims. The help line is exactly that — a resource designed to help during times of crisis.

In my eyes, sex abuse survivors, and those who help them, are heroes — human heroes, of course — just like anyone who is striving to build a safer world than the one into which I was born. The accounts of abuse I read in the AP's reporting are devastating. We all must continue to champion and help innocent people who suffer too much at the hands of abusers.

*Kate Taylor Lauck is an investigative attorney who specializes in child abuse. She holds a master's degree in national security strategies from the U.S. Naval War College and graduated cum laude from Georgetown Law in 2017.*

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