

August 20, 2008

Honorable Michael Wachs -

Using online personal ads, Mr. Brunstetter apparently selected a vulnerable, overworked woman in order to gain access to her child; concealing a volatile temper, massive debt, bouts with mental illness, and time spent in mental health facilities, disciplinary schools, and adult criminal facilities, as he propelled the relationship quickly toward the altar.

During the course of our marriage, he was never gainfully employed, nor was he receiving any form of financial assistance. His sole contribution to the household was getting my daughter ready for school in the morning. Believing I was putting Lauren's needs ahead of mine, I did everything I could to make the marriage work. Had I been aware of the abuse, I'd have left him at once, and never let him get near her again.

There is absolutely no excuse or any reason in the world that could ever justify any of Mr. Brunstetter's actions. His behavior was unacceptable, indefensible and unforgivable. No matter what his life circumstances are or were he had no right to indulge his sexual perversion with a confused eight-year-old girl. It is traumatizing for a child to be sexually attacked and then told by the predator that he loves them and that these acts are consensual.

Mr. Brunstetter occasionally joked during our marriage that when Lauren turned 18 he would divorce me and marry her. I certainly never thought he meant it, and it did not occur to me until the abuse came to light that Lauren might have believed every word. Considering that she came to understand the nature of the acts they had engaged in as being sexual while they were going on (via school sex education) this fiction may have been very important to her, thereby making his subsequent "abandonment" of her extremely difficult to bear. It was shortly thereafter that she began injuring herself.

When I found out that my daughter had been slicing herself up with razor blades over a span of at least several months, I was shocked, frightened, and confused. I was simultaneously angry at the monster that had mutilated my child and devastated for my injured daughter. I was sure she intended to kill herself, or would do so accidentally. I was afraid to let her out of my sight, so for a time she slept on a twin mattress on the living room floor. She was only allowed privacy in the bathroom, and then only after the room had been purged of sharp objects and medications. Knives, scissors, shavers, straight pins and wire hangers were locked in the master bedroom to protect her. I wanted to do what was best for my daughter, but wasn't sure what that was. The following day she began therapy at Delmarva Family Resources.

After she revealed the abuse, I learned about For All Seasons, specializing in rape trauma victims and victims of child sexual assault. Lauren was accepted into their program, and since that time we have begun therapy targeted toward dealing with her experiences as a victim of this unspeakable crime. Lauren has already spent more than two years in counseling, and consumed thousands of dollars in prescriptions, yet she still has a long way to go before she regains a normal perspective of interpersonal relationships after Mr. Brunstetter's betrayal. Many times in the past three years, Lauren's mental health needs required me to leave work early for scheduled medical and counseling appointments, and unexpectedly to deal with emergencies. When at work, I've often had difficulty concentrating and am frequently overcome by emotion. No doubt my coworkers wondered what was wrong with me, as I sat silently at my desk, tears streaming down my face as I worked. At the least, it made people uncomfortable.

Her demeanor has improved, and she is making better choices. She has stopped injuring herself, although she has scars across her thighs, abdomen, arms, and calves. I doubt Mr. Brunstetter can begin to comprehend the harm he did to Lauren's psyche, and by extension, to her body, which she sliced to ribbons time and again as a dysfunctional coping mechanism to deal with her unimaginable suffering. She is now facing numerous cosmetic procedures to repair her scars. In the meantime, they are an ugly reminder that she now realizes proclaim to the world her status as a formerly molested child.

The strain of the last few years can also be seen in Lauren's high school transcripts. Her GPA, which was 4.0 her first semester of High School has slowly declined to 2.833. Her dreams of college may never come to fruition. She's way behind her peers in social maturity; her emotional growth crippled by her childhood experiences. She is prone to occasional inappropriate behavior and has been sent for (outpatient) psychological evaluations as a condition of returning to school twice.

I myself am coming to terms with learning that someone I once loved, trusted and shared a life with, who I thought was a stabilizing influence on Lauren, could turn out to be this evil. I spent years of my life thinking things were one way, only to learn that I was deceived. Now even the few memories of our time together that were once happy turn my stomach to knots.

I don't feel confident anymore that ANYBODY is what they claim to be, or sure of my ability to detect deception. I still find myself looking back over the time we were together for indications that I missed at the time. I feel as if I let my daughter down, and I take very seriously my responsibility to get her the help she needs to heal. In addition to the private sessions Lauren attends at For All Seasons, I am currently involved in family therapy there to learn how to help her.

Everyone has a right to go about his or her life without being singled out for abuse. Lauren is entitled to have a family, friends and a social life; to feel safe and to believe that there are good people in the world. It is impossible to judge everyone, and living in a state of paranoia is exhausting and dangerous.

The legal process in and of itself has been a traumatic ordeal, and especially intrusive for a teenaged girl who has suddenly had her whole life examined and criticized as though she was being further punished for having revealed the original violation. Things shared with her counselor in presumed confidence, and private online conversations with her school friends and romantic interests were laid out for the court to review. This is certainly not something any young girl would subject herself to for any reason but one; regardless of his denials, Mr. Brunstetter is guilty of the allegations against him.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lisa Banks Turner". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned directly below the word "Sincerely,".

Lisa Banks Turner