

PURSUIT OF TRUTH: ADULT SURVIVORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE SEEKING JUSTICE

VIEWING GUIDE



www.pursuitoftruthfilm.com

ABOUT THE FILM

SYNOPSIS

Chronicling the struggles of adult survivors of child sex abuse to seek justice against their abusers, *Pursuit of Truth* shines a bright light on the legal system's shocking suppression of survivors' right to establish the truth behind their abuse. The film removes the blindfolds to expose the shameful secret that despite the epidemic of childhood sex abuse in this county, our justice system too often obstructs survivors and permits their abusers to escape unscathed.

The film centers on the plight of survivors who have sought legal redress against their abusers and the story is told in large part from the survivors' perspectives. In their own words, the survivors describe in moving and explicit terms their personal journeys to obtain justice and the obstacles that blocked their paths. The film also features interviews with experts in the litigation of child sex abuse cases who collectively weigh in on the fundamental flaws in the system and recommend needed reforms.

By presenting the survivors' stories interwoven with the experts' commentary, *Pursuit of Truth* uncovers the pitfalls survivors encounter when they seek to lawfully confront their abusers. In doing so, the film raises serious questions about current police procedures, prosecutorial charging decisions, defense tactics, and judicial responses to survivors' claims. The film breaks new ground by revealing the many injustices suffered by survivors and identifying what can be done to bring about necessary systemic changes.

While the film realistically identifies the many barriers that survivors must overcome to obtain justice, the film also serves to encourage survivors to assert their legal rights by portraying the courageous survivors who have navigated the legal system successfully. Thus, the message of the film is one of empowerment. The filmmakers fervently hope *Pursuit of Truth* will lead to a national commitment to make justice a reality for all survivors who demonstrate the strength and determination to hold their abusers accountable before the law.

To that end, *Pursuit of Truth* is a story that deserves to be told and needs to be heard -- for the sake of survivors, past and present, as well as for the sake of our children. See www.pursuitoftruthfilm.com.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The film project grew out of the personal experience of one of the filmmakers in fighting to obtain justice for a family member who had been sexually abused as a child. The family's odyssey through the legal system was marked by countless impediments – incompetence, indifference, and procedural devices that are heavily weighted against adult survivors and in favor of their perpetrators. This experience led to the realization that as presently constituted, the process retraumatizes survivors by invading their rights to privacy and subjecting them to inherently unfair practices. Paradoxically, the very system that should support the assertion of survivors' legal rights against those who abused them, instead revictimizes survivors who seek nothing more than to pursue their lawful claims.

The filmmakers concluded that the system needs to be transformed from the bottom up and that a film documentary was the most effective method to initiate the process of exposure and education. They were surprised to discover that no documentaries had yet been made on the topic of the legal system's handling of cases involving adult survivors who seek to hold their perpetrators accountable before the law. Given the plights of survivors in a number of high-profile cases, the time to lift the shroud of secrecy from this subject was well past due.

The film initially was conceived as a rather narrow project consisting almost exclusively of interviews with survivors who had experienced the challenges of the criminal or civil justice system. To find subjects, the filmmakers conducted searches for press stories and researched court cases involving adult survivors. They pre-interviewed numerous survivors in various parts of the country. The survivors who appear in this film cross all demographics – age, gender, race, ethnicity, and social class. Each of them sought to pursue legal claims against their abusers. Some were successful and some less so. However, the common thread connecting their experiences in the legal system was the counterintuitive impression that they, rather than their perpetrators, were the ones on trial.

As they continued to research the film, the filmmakers came to realize that the subject matter was much more complex and that the systemic problems were much more pervasive than they had thought initially. The pre-interviews and legal research established that the legal system's approach to survivor cases was broken

fundamentally and that the film would be able to make that point effectively only by obtaining expert commentary to underscore and amplify the survivors' stories.

As a result of that realization, the filmmakers then conducted a national search to identify the leading experts in each of the fields related to the litigation of survivor cases, e.g., prosecutors, judges, law enforcement officers, private lawyers, victim advocates, psychologists. Based on their pre-interviews of many such experts and an exhaustive review of their work, the filmmakers narrowed the list down to a diverse group of experts who were willing to speak on the record. Ultimately, the impressively-credentialed group consisted of two large-city district attorneys whose offices had prosecuted a number of high-profile child sex abuse cases involving the clergy, members of a city police force that applies a much more progressive and survivor-directed approach to sexual assault investigations, private attorneys who specialize in representing survivors in filing legal claims against their abusers, a retired family court chief judge, and mental health professionals who evaluate and treat complex trauma caused by child sexual abuse. Each of the experts was chosen to provide her/his particular insight into the existing flaws in the justice system and the changes that would make the process more responsive and less traumatic for survivors.

The filmmakers traveled to Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Boston, West Palm Beach, Philadelphia, and Ashland, Oregon to interview the survivors and experts. The filmed survivor interviews proved to be incredibly emotional and dramatic. While the filmmakers were concerned initially that the encounters could trigger painful memories in the subjects, the survivors proved eager to recount their stories, believing that by doing so, they could help other survivors while simultaneously contribute to efforts to reform the legal system. Many of the interviewees found that the experience of describing their quests for justice in front of a camera for a film to be disseminated to wide audiences validated their legal journeys to hold their abusers accountable.

The filmmakers were struck by the honesty, strength, and resilience of the survivors. Their stories differed in the particulars but common themes emerged. In the end, the survivors spoke with a single, powerful voice that shattered the silence that had too-often hidden away the struggles of survivors to assert their

legal rights. The film is their film and is dedicated to their courageous pursuit of truth.

ABOUT THE ISSUE: ADULT SURVIVORS AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Childhood sexual abuse is a pervasive and pressing national problem, cutting across all gender, racial, ethnicity, and socioeconomic lines. Adult retrospective studies indicate that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 5 or 6 boys were sexually abused before age 18 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). Based on those numbers, there are some 42 million adult survivors in this country alone (Children's Assessment Center, Houston, Texas, 2013). These numbers reflect the epidemic nature of the problem. Child sexual abuse exacts a terrible price on its victims who suffer long-term psychological and emotional injuries, as well as on society in general in terms of lost output of survivors and payment of the massive medical and mental health costs of treating their injuries.

Child sexual abuse is not only a crime that is committed behind closed doors where there are virtually no witnesses, it remains in the dark because children typically are unable to speak about their abuse. This inability to come forward frequently continues into adulthood. Indeed, close to 90% of cases are never reported to authorities. Thus, despite its pervasiveness and severe consequences, childhood sex abuse has largely remained in the shadows, hidden away from the wheels of our justice system.

The legal system itself must share responsibility for such tragic underreporting. As presently constituted, our legal process constructs unfair barriers for survivors to overcome to achieve justice against their abusers. Unjust laws, police/prosecution practices that discriminate against delayed reporting cases, and a wrong-headed judicial process combine to make it extremely difficult for survivors to successfully assert their legal rights and far too easy for perpetrators to walk free and continue to abuse their victims.

Arbitrary statutes of limitation, i.e., the deadlines set by legislatures within which legal claims – civil or criminal – must be filed, bar many survivors from even entering the courthouse doors. Such filing deadlines too often result in injustice to

survivors who, for a variety of reasons having to do with the unique dynamics of the abuse they suffered as children, including traumatic amnesia, shame, guilt, or fear, are unable to disclose their abuse or confront their abusers until much later in adulthood when it is too late to file a legal claim. It is not surprising, then, that an estimated 60%-70% of survivors' cases nationally are excluded by existing statutes of limitation. Other cases are derailed by the justice system's failure to recognize or consider the unique nature of survivor cases, which involve individuals who were victimized as children but are entering the legal process as adults.

Expanded media coverage of adult survivors' exercise of their legal rights against their perpetrators has helped to create a growing public awareness of, and interest in, our legal system's handling of survivors' cases. Yet much of the public is still largely unaware that for most adult survivors, there is little or no justice. But winds of change are stirring. There is a growing movement afoot to transform the justice system's fundamental approach to survivors' cases. Reformers in a number of states have successfully either eliminated statutes of limitation in survivors' cases or at least expanded the filing deadlines substantially and provided survivors whose statutes already expired a window within which they can file their claims.

Moreover, activists are shining the light on the need to educate and train all legal system professionals, from law enforcement first responders to prosecutors, civil attorneys, and judges, to better understand the behaviors and mentality of adult survivors and how they differ from the more typical crime victim. An improved systemic understanding of survivor cases will incentivize survivors to exercise their legal rights and will result ultimately in perpetrators being held legally accountable for their crimes. This development would help protect children from abuse by taking perpetrators off the street and by deterring other potential abusers from committing such crimes. Only then will justice become a reality, rather than merely an ideal, for survivors who seek to hold their abusers accountable before the law.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

VALERIE GIBSON (Executive Producer/Co-Producer) is the founder and CEO of the Vertigo Charitable Foundation, LLC (“VCF”), whose mission is to help reform the legal system’s responses to survivor cases. She conceived of the film project and was directly involved in every aspect of the filmmaking, including research, selection and interviewing of featured subjects and experts, film shoots, editing, and post-production. She has participated in film forums and discussion panels to address the need for education and training to improve the quality of justice for survivors.

KATHY BARBINI (Director/Producer) is an award-winning documentary and television producer/director and is the founder of Big Voice Pictures. Her work focuses on diverse social issues and her independent films have been funded by leading foundations and distributed internationally. She is the producer/director of two widely-acclaimed documentaries about surviving child sexual abuse, *The Healing Years* and *Boys and Men Healing*.

NEIL JAFFEE (Co-Producer) is VCF’s legal counsel. He is an experienced litigator and legal writer, who previously taught both trial and appellate advocacy as an adjunct professor at a number of D.C. area law schools. His filmmaking responsibilities included legal research, writing, interviewing and preparation of featured legal experts, assisting at film shoots, and editing. He writes a blog for VCF’s website about matters relating to the legal rights of adult survivors and is a member of the National Crime Victims Bar Association and the National Alliance of Victims’ Rights Attorneys.

LAURA CAIN (Co-Producer) is a documentary producer/director whose work has focused on the trauma suffered by childhood abuse survivors. Her previous films, *Behind Closed Doors: Trauma Survivors and the Psychiatric System* and the award-winning *Healing Neen*, exposed the lack of, and desperate need for, effective trauma treatment of survivors. She is currently directing and producing *Walking Thru Bullets*, which follows young victims of violence trying to heal their physical and emotional wounds through an innovative trauma program. In addition to her filmmaking, she is a civil rights attorney at the Maryland Disability Law Center in Baltimore, MD.

FEATURED SUBJECTS

LAUREN BOOK is an adult survivor of child sexual abuse and is the co-founder, along with her father, Ronald Book, of Lauren's Kids, a nonprofit organization that works to create a world in which the exploitation of children is not tolerated. Through their organization, the Books have worked to pass legislation in Florida to protect crime victims and end the cycle of future, including the nation's toughest mandatory reports laws, protection of child safety zones, and elimination of statutes of limitation for criminal and civil prosecution of sexual crimes against children. Ms. Book has been recognized for her outstanding contribution to education relating to sexual abuse and for her work both within Florida and nationally. Her memoir chronicling her years of abuse, *It's OK to Tell*, sheds light on the truth about abuse and the healing journey that a victim must endure to become a survivor.

RONALD BOOK is an attorney/activist who specializes in government affairs and administrative law. He is a founding member and Chairman of Lauren's Kids. He operates his own lobbying practice, Ronald L. Book, P.A., in Aventura and Tallahassee, Florida. Mr. Book is active in South Florida's professional arena, serving on more than 20 community organizations, including as a trustee of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce and a member of the Legislative Affairs and State Affairs Committees.

JOHN CHAPMAN is a survivor of child sexual abuse, a former law enforcement officer, and an activist. His distant relationship with his abusive, alcoholic father led to his abuse from the ages of 11-13 by a male mentor. Following the end of the abuse, Mr. Chapman became confused about his sexuality, often withdrawing from friends and even contemplating suicide. Through prayer, he overcame those hardships and eventually became a police detective with the intention of helping other abuse victims. He fulfilled this goal when he joined the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, working to track down on-line sexual predators and saving numerous children from suffering their own abuse. After twenty-five years of police work, Mr. Chapman retired to start his own healing. He continues to

participate in ongoing therapy and has come full circle -- a victim, a survivor, a protector, and now a thriver.

KARINAH GUZMAN is a survivor and activist. After eleven years of keeping her childhood sexual abuse a secret, she battled with the psychological aftermath alone and in silence. But after suspecting that her younger cousin was a victim of the same abuse, she found the strength, courage and faith to take her abuser to court. Her disclosure quickly divided the family and she was subjected to a harrowing court process. After the trial, her abuser was sentenced to twelve years in prison -- the same amount of time that she was held a prisoner of her silence. The following year, Ms. Guzman produced a short film entitled, *The Valley*, depicting her psychological experience during the trial. She is currently writing a young adult novel about child sexual abuse, hoping to help others who are in similar situations find their voices.

MARK LUSTIG is a survivor and activist. He is a married father of three and a grandfather of one. Having been sexually abused as a child by his mother, he did not divulge his abuse until the birth of his own son, which triggered his abuse memories. Mr. Lustig sought therapy and began publicly speaking about his experiences in an effort to heal, as well as to raise funds to obtain treatment for sexually abused children whose families could not afford it.

FEATURED EXPERTS

DANIEL BROWN, Ph.D., is the Director of the Center for Integrative Psychotherapy in Newton, MA, and is Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology at the Harvard Medical School. His 14 books include *Memory, Trauma Treatment and the Law* (with A.W. Schefflin and D.C. Hammond), which won the 1999 Manfred S. Guttmacher Award from the American Psychiatric Association as the “outstanding contribution to forensic psychiatry.” He has served as an expert witness in numerous court cases, including some resulting in appellate decisions involving memory for trauma, the effects of interviewing on memory for trauma/abuse, and the reliability of memory in children and adults.

DIANE CHAMPE' is retired from a Fortune 20 company where she was a Marketing/Sales Strategic Planner on the Regional Vice President's staff. She is a Subject Matter Expert (S.M.E.) on issues relating to child abuse and neglect. As a survivor herself, she dedicates her efforts toward working on behalf of adult survivors, publishing books/information and speaking publicly about the long-term effects of child abuse and neglect. She speaks to colleges/universities, law enforcement, child advocacy centers, and legislators. The nonprofit E. Diane Champé Institute provides safe havens for adult survivors of child abuse and neglect. Ms. Champe's autobiography, *Conquering Incest: My Life as a Trauma Survivor*, was published in April 2011.

CHRISTINE A. COURTOIS, Ph.D., ABPP, is a psychologist in private practice in Washington, D.C. She has received numerous professional awards including the 1996 American Psychological Association Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychology as a Professional Practice. She has authored four books, *Treating Complex Trauma: A Sequenced, Relationship-Based Approach* (2013 with Dr. Julian Ford) ; *Recollections of Sexual Abuse: Treatment Principles and Guidelines* (1999), *Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse: A Workshop Model* (1993), and *Healing the Incest Wound: Adult Survivors in Therapy* (2010 revision and 1988), and co-edited two books with Dr. Ford, *The Treatment of Complex Trauma in Children and Adolescents* (2013) and *The Treatment of Complex Trauma: An Evidence-Based Approach* (2009), in addition to numerous articles and chapters on related topics. Dr. Courtois conducts professional training locally, nationally, and internationally and is a member of the Board of Directors of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies.

MICHAEL DOLCE is a nationally recognized lawyer and political activist on behalf of children and crime victims, as well as a survivor himself. He has achieved historic victories for his clients and greater safety for society by spearheading changes in the law and by using litigation to encourage society's institutions, businesses and individuals to improve safety of children and vulnerable adults. In 2010, his tenacious six-year crusade in Florida's legislature overcame a powerful and well-financed opposition to culminate in the passage of sweeping legislation that repealed all statutes of limitation for civil and criminal prosecution of child sexual battery. That victory was fueled by his testimony numerous times before legislative committees and a grassroots army that he

assembled and led as the chair of the political committee, Protect Our Kids First, Inc. In 2009, Mr. Dolce achieved one of the highest jury verdicts in Florida history for a child sexual abuse victim. The verdict exceeded \$19 million and was named by Verdict Search as one of the top 100 verdicts nationwide that year.

HON. JOHN A. FRUSCIANTE is a retired judge of the 17th Judicial Circuit Court in Broward County, Florida, where he served in every division in the circuit during his 20-year tenure on the bench and was the Chief Judge of the Family Division. Before becoming a judge, he was in private practice and a prosecutor in the sex crimes and child abuse unit. Judge Frusciante has served on many committees of the Florida Bar, including the Code and Rules of Evidence Committee and the Juvenile Rules Committee and was the first Chair of the initial Computer Crime Committee of the American Bar Association. He has taught other judges in many areas of the law including Dependency, Family and Criminal Law.

CLAIRE HARWELL is an attorney/activist and is a national trainer on sexual assault issues for police, prosecutors, medical providers, civil attorneys, judges, and counselors. She developed a sexual assault victim services training curriculum and a volunteer advocate training curriculum for use in the United States Air Force worldwide. She served at the Victim's Rights Law Center in Boston as the national trainer of attorneys representing victims of sexual assault. Ms. Harwell was formerly the division director for the New Mexico Attorney General's Violence Against Women Office. While practicing in New Mexico, she prosecuted a variety of high-profile violent offenses and conducted extensive training for law enforcement, medical providers, civil attorneys, counselors, and prosecutors, on a variety of topics.

WILLIAM HODGMAN is the Assistant District Attorney for line operations for the District Attorney for Los Angeles County. From 2002-2005, he was the Head Deputy of the Sex Crimes Division. In that capacity, he coordinated the investigation and prosecution of child sexual abuse crimes committed by the Catholic clergy. While serving in different trial assignments and special prosecution units over the course of a 32-year career with the District Attorney's Office, Mr. Hodgman has tried to jury over 140 felony cases, including 40 murder cases. His experience includes the successful 1991 trial prosecution of Charles Keating for securities fraud, the 1993-1994 investigation of Michael Jackson

regarding child molestation allegations, and the 1994-1995 murder prosecution of O.J. Simpson. Mr. Hodgman was selected as the Outstanding Prosecutor of the Year by the California District Attorneys Association in 1992 and in 2000 was inducted into the American College of Trial Lawyers in Washington, D.C.

TERRY HOLDERNESS has been a police officer for over 35 years and has been Chief of the Ashland (Oregon) Police Department since April of 2007. Prior to coming to Ashland, he worked at the Fontana (California) Police Department for 25 years, in various positions from patrol officer to division commander. He has a Bachelors' degree in Criminal Justice, a Masters in Education and is a graduate of the Senior Management Institute for Police and the California Command College. He is a nationally recognized expert in Community and Problem Oriented Policing, having written several articles and spoken at numerous national and international conferences on those subjects.

CARRIE HULL is a Detective in the Ashland Police Department, with a special emphasis on child abuse, child sexual abuse and adult sexual assault cases. She was instrumental in instituting the Department's innovative, victim-centered, and offender-focused approach to sexual assault investigations. She is an instructor with the Oregon Sexual Assault Training Institute where she teaches best practices in sexual assault investigations to law enforcement officers across the nation as well as a member of the Legislative and Public Policy Committee for the Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force. Det. Hull is the founder and administrator of the Southern Oregon Sexual Assault Symposium, the 'You Have Options' sexual assault reporting campaign, ReportingOptions.org and the "I Will" sexual assault prevention campaign.

SHARI KARNEY is a leading legal advocate for sexual abuse in America, as well as a survivor herself. She led the charge to change statutes of limitation for victims of child sexual abuse in California and in 40 other states. Ms. Karney is known for intense, interesting and quick fire responses to headline-grabbing news and trials of the day. She is also the author of *Prey No Longer*, a legal guide for how to deal with sexual abuse. She has received ChildHelp USA's most prestigious award, "Friend of the Children," as well as the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Award.

WENDY MURPHY is an attorney/activist and a nationally recognized expert on child abuse and interpersonal violence. She has published numerous academic and pop culture articles, and is the author of *And Justice for Some* (2007). Ms. Murphy provides legal analysis for a number of media outlets and is a co-host on WRKO radio. She began her career as a prosecutor in Middlesex County, Massachusetts, handling child abuse and sex crime cases, and then moved into private practice, focusing on violence against women and children. She is an adjunct faculty member at New England School of Law, where she teaches a seminar on sexual violence law and helped establish the Judicial Language Project, which uses socio-linguistic research to critique the language used in law and society to describe violence against women and children, the first of its kind in the United States.

R. SETH WILLIAMS is the District Attorney for the City of Philadelphia, PA. He was elected on November 3, 2009, winning more than 75% of the vote and thereby becoming the first African-American District Attorney of Philadelphia and in the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. His office has aggressively prosecuted sexual crimes against children, including those committed by Catholic clergy. In 2012, Mr. Williams became the first prosecutor in the country to obtain a conviction against a church official for endangering children by shuffling pedophile priests to different parishes.

AWARDS:

Winner, Award of Merit, Accolade Competition, 2013

Finalist, Best Documentary, Cenflo Film Festival, 2013

Official Selection AAWIC, 2013

Official Selection Chicago International Social Justice Film Festival, 2013

Official Selection Breckenridge Festival of Film, 2013

Official Selection Chagrin Documentary Film Festival, 2013

Official Selection Social Justice Film Festival, 2013

Official Selection Chain Film Festival, 2013

Official Selection, New Hope Film Festival, 2014

Official Selection, Portsmouth (UK) Film Festival, 2014

Official Selection, American Psychiatric Association Film Festival, 2014