

## Fumi's Story

- On my first day of school in junior kindergarten my mother was called to come and get me because I hid under a table crying and would not come out until she came....During junior kindergarten I missed 43 days of school. When I asked my mother if she remembers me being sick at this point in my life, she said that she does not remember.
- Around grade one, I began being sexually abused by my older male cousin. In school I continued to struggle. I was described as quiet and independent and began having difficulty with my small motor and reading skills. By March of grade one, I had missed 20 days of school.
- My grade-two teacher Mrs. Currie used to hit my hand with a ruler if I held my pencil incorrectly with my right hand, to force me to write with my other hand. I remember being terrified to go to school because of this teacher.
- Around this time, my sister became hospitalized and then passed away. A few months later, my father left my mother...To my knowledge, this was the first time that my father hit my mother. He had hit me in the past but seeing my mum bandaged up after he left really shook me up.
- I remember grade three being surprisingly good, but I think this was because my teacher, Mrs. Orgill, was a wonderful woman who was very caring and spent a lot of time with me. I have many positive memories of school and remember doing really well this year.
- At this point, school was my escape from home. The sexual abuse from my cousin was increasing, because he started babysitting me while my mother was grieving the loss of her child, her husband and her eldest child leaving home.
- I don't remember much from grades four and five but I do remember doing poorly in school. I had a difficult time making friends my age and began spending time with a group of older kids. At some point during this time, I was separated from my class and put in a room with three other children.

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There were adults who began giving us tests, which I think were psychological or assessment tests of some sort. I remember being talked to about learning disabilities but I really didn't understand why I was there.

- I started to have a heart problems and I began suffering from severe migraines that left me immobilized. Due to this I had to take quite a bit of time off of school, though I don't know exact number of days. The violence at home began to severely increase to the point where my mother and I spent time in the hospital due to injuries.
- At this time, I really hated school and would often do whatever I could to not go. This was in grades four and five. I was often legitimately sick but I also remember pretending to be sick a lot so I could stay home with my mother to make sure my stepfather didn't hurt her. I spent more time hanging out with my older friends at the pool hall. I began smoking and the other kids at school didn't like me. I even remember trying to get some other kids to smoke and then getting in trouble for it and being told I was a bad influence. I started hanging around with kids that were robbing grocery stores and a few run-ins with the police.
- My stepfather wasn't around for a few months, but then he appeared at my school one day and tried to abduct me. The police were called and I was escorted home. Some of the other kids saw me with the police officers and started rumours at school about how I was arrested.
- One good thing about middle school was that we got to have separate classes in subjects like music and drama. This was the first time that I felt that I was good at something. My music and drama teachers were incredible and were always encouraging me and telling me that I was very talented. We started getting letter grades at this point and I had an A+ in Drama and a B+ in Music. This helped offset my Ds and Es in English, French and Math. Even though I felt as if I was invisible in school, I was very excited to go to school on the days when I had my music and drama classes.
- At times, I would resort to stealing food and money to buy food. I would usually buy chocolate bars and chips from the convenience store....I

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started a new school, and on the first day of class my mother dressed me in a dress and made me look pretty. The kids were all nice to me. On my second day of class I dressed in my regular 'tomboy wear': jeans, t-shirt and a jean jacket that had heavy metal band names all over it. The kids that thought I was nice the day before suddenly hated me and from then on so did most of all the other kids in grade six.

- I met my favourite high school teacher when he taught me at summer school. Mr. Balestrin was fantastic and used fun teaching methods that helped me understand where I was making my errors. I finished that class with an A+ and had the highest mark in the class. He encouraged me and helped feel smart.
- I had made a core group of solid friends and I continued to excel in the arts, which were made more available to me in high school. I even started to slowly pull up my grades. By grade eleven I started to take more chances.
- Violence absolutely hindered my learning in the classroom. It took a big toll on my self-esteem and for a good portion of my life I felt worthless and 'stupid'. Continuously being told I was 'stupid' played a big part in why I thought so poorly of myself. I heard it at home, it was reinforced at school and then I just began believing it and reinforcing it on to myself. I stayed away from school for ten years because I honestly believed that I was unable to learn.
- I was constantly uneasy around any teacher with a controlling demeanor. Also if any of the kids that bullied me in school were in one of my classes, I either dropped the course or had very poor attendance. I learned very young that I could get away with just not showing up if I wanted to attempt to make a problem disappear.
- By the time I graduated high school I had attended nine different schools. A lot of this moving around was do to the violence.
- I needed an education enriched with art and alternative learning. I am certain that there are many other children survivors of violence who would benefit from a similar curriculum.

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- When I enrolled in AWCCA I was terrified that I would have difficulty learning. This program has totally quashed any negative ideas that I had about my learning and intelligence. I successfully completed last semester with a GPA of 4.0 and made the honour role.
- I thought my teachers were 'crazy' for giving me A's. I was convinced that they were just marking me easy. I soon realized that thinking like this not only discrediting me it was also discrediting my teachers.
- ...what I needed was for all my teachers to give a damn. In all my years in school I can only remember four or five teachers who had a positive impact on me. Even then none of these teachers ever asked me if everything was okay at home or asked me if I needed to talk about anything. To my knowledge no teacher, principal, school nurse, counsellor or any other adult in a school setting ever acknowledged that there was something wrong. Not only did I feel invisible but the violence that I was experiencing was also invisible. To me, this ignorance was just another form of violence.