

February 22, 2021

I am Victim #1.

I was groomed.

I was sexually abused.

In 2008, I was seventeen, a senior at Silver Creek High School. I was heavily involved in theater—it was my happy place, the tech side of it. I loved building sets day after day on a blank stage and watching shows come to life. I loved the family and friends it came with. I trusted it to help me cope with the difficult situations I was dealing with at home. And I trusted my teacher, Nathan Shewell, to provide much-needed guidance and help me navigate those difficult situations.

I confided in Mr. Shewell, telling him about the problems I was facing and he helped me solve them. When something in my life went wrong, he was there to console me. I appreciated that he cared and valued any advice that he offered.

He began with simple touches on my shoulder. They felt like comfort for things that felt out of my control. Small kind gestures to go along with his guidance in life and in theater. Innocent, reassuring. Then one day, he wasn't just touching my shoulder, but also my face; before I knew it, his hands, his focus, had shifted down to feel the small of my back and then his hands would fall around my waist, holding my hips when he was speaking to me.

Suddenly he was commenting on my body, an observation about how my chest or my butt looked, how looking at those areas made him feel. Soon the offhand remarks were more frequent, more explicit, more sexual. Then he started talking to me about his sex life, describing what he liked to do with his wife as well as his other sexual partners. He spoke to me like he was confiding in me, as a way of expressing that he cared about me, about my well-being—like he was the only one who truly did.

My happiness was replaced with control. I withdrew parts of myself from my friends and gave them to him. When friends came too close that were not approved by him, they became victims of him. Verbally abused, mocked, made fun of. He would tell me my friends were wrong, and if those friends were males, he said they only wanted one thing from me.

A little over a year after I met Nathan Shewell, a year of mental, physical, and sexual control, I realized I was being used for his sexual gratification. For a brief moment, I was afraid of losing the one person who convinced he cared above all others. Deep down I knew I had to distance myself from him, and that is what I did.

A few years after I ended contact with Shewell, I was approached by someone I went to high school with. She walked up to me and asked, "Did you have sex with Shewell?" The feeling was something I can't adequately describe. The air was stolen from my lungs and I felt sick. I thought I escaped him; I thought I left those memories behind. But in that moment, in an instant, my entire life was reduced to that: the girl who had sex with Nathan Shewell. I told her "no" because

the answer was not that simple, and that seemed less wrong than saying “Yes.” How could anyone ever understand what being coerced into a sexual relationship as a child feels like?

It was ten years after I distanced myself before I was able to understand that what had transpired was an abuse of power, that I was a victim of opportunistic and predatory behavior from a man – a *teacher* – I’d trusted when I was most vulnerable. That he took advantage of my vulnerability to first groom and then sexually abuse me for almost two years.

In May of 2020, I sat in my hometown’s police station and shared what had happened to me at the request of North Central High School—the school which was finally investigating allegations made against my former teacher as part of an investigation that began after I’d revealed what I’d experienced while Mr. Shewell’s student. I thought that would be it: the end of my story, the beginning of my justice.

“No,” the detective said, “too much time has passed.”


The state of Indiana says I waited too long. It had been ten years, and the state of Indiana says I only have seven years to speak up if a sexual crime has been committed.

How does a law—a *piece of paper*—dictate that I only have seven years to be considered a victim of sexual abuse? Why do legislators I have never met get to decide when I should be mentally prepared to take on the DARKEST parts of my life? Why does anyone have a right to tell me that I have no right to justice simply because of the passage of time?

Even though the state of Indiana is preventing me from receiving criminal justice for the abuse I experienced at the hands of Nathan Shewell, I’ve chosen to share my story now in order to help others receive the justice due to them—whether they were wronged by Nathan Shewell or a mismanaged investigation within their school system or they are facing the expiration of the statute of limitations.

I cannot run from being a victim; the truth is, though, that I am also a survivor. Not only that, but I can—and *will*—fight against the system that provides more protection for abusers than the victims of their abuse because I am also a warrior for justice. I will not be silent—I will tell my story everywhere to everyone who will listen to foster greater understanding and be an advocate for change.

And the need for change is indisputable because I am not the only victim—I am one of many women who were only girls when they became victims of both Nathan Shewell and a failed system; one of many girls who are currently victims of other predators like him and other failed systems. We *cannot* let what happened to me happen to anyone else, but until there is change... there will always be more.



Ashley Nation, Victim #1