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Author urges child sex abuse victims to speak out

By Rebecca Jones
STAFF WRITER

She was successful, but suffering.

Stephanie L. Jones was lonely, stressed, depressed.

It wasn't until her late 20s that she began to connect the dots between what had happened to her from childhood through junior high school, and how it was affecting her adult life.

The Redford woman's self-published book, *The Enemy Between My Legs*, released last month, chronicles seven years of sexual abuse she endured beginning at age 5.

Back then, she promised not to tell. Eighty-eight percent of victims do not tell, according to the American Psychological Association.

"We don't want to talk about it," Jones said. "It's embarrassing."

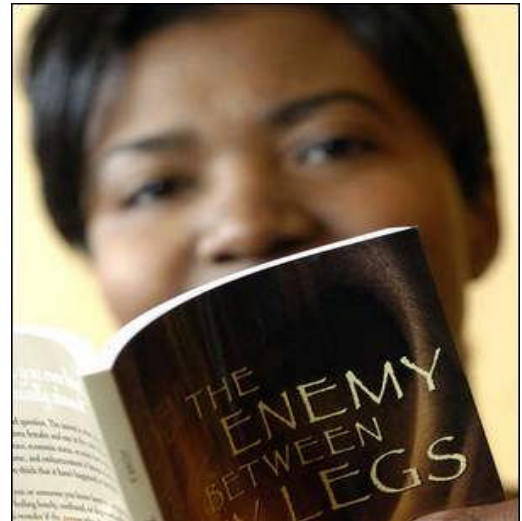
But child sexual abuse happens in families, across race and class boundaries, in children's homes. It's usually not a registered sex offender committing the act. Mothers and fathers, step-parents, aunts and uncles, babysitters, older children - none can be overlooked, Jones said.

As many as one in three females and one in five males have been sexually abused, Jones cites, but admits that because child sexual abuse is rarely reported, the numbers vary.

"I want to help people," she said. "People have got to be hurting like I was. I can't be the only one."

In her 144-page book, Jones shares her story and interviews with two sexual abuse survivors. In plain writing, it tells parents what signs to look for both in terms of signs of abuse and what to be wary of, and serves as a self-help guide for victims of sexual abuse.

She urges victims to speak out to their family, even if they're fearful, to release the pain and stop the cycle.



photos by Tom Hoffmeyer | Staff Photographer

Redford resident Stephanie L. Jones holds a copy of her book *The Enemy Between My Legs*. Jones tells her own story of sexual abuse, to reach out to other victims and help parents know what to watch for.

"Usually sexual abuse is generational," she said. "Keeping silent only makes it go on year after year."

Parents must say more than, "Don't let anyone touch you," she said.

Jones, who has worked for Fortune 500 companies and as a publicist, opted out of the corporate world to become a child sexual abuse advocate.

She volunteers at high schools, speaks to national audiences and wants to extend her work to help prostitutes and women in prisons.

She asks: Have you ever been sexually abused?

"There is no 'Well, maybe,'" she said. "If it is yes, then did you deal with that hurt? ... That pain rolls over into other areas of your life."

Teen pregnancy, prostitution, drug use and psychiatric disorders are some examples.

Jones, 32, grew up in Detroit and comes from a large extended family.

Beginning at age 13, she led a sexually promiscuous lifestyle and always had older boyfriends who could supply alcohol, but she maintained an "A" average and hid behind her success.

At Eastern Michigan University, she quickly developed a reputation on campus and soon dropped out. She said she used drugs to slip in and out of character. She shopped - a lot - so she would look good and get attention, and ended up swimming in credit card debt.

Eventually, she became sick and tired of the lifestyle, but it was a struggle to leave behind.

Four-and-a-half years ago, she married Robert, a boy who grew up down the street, a good guy whom she calls a strong supportive husband. He was nothing like the bad boys she associated with during troubled times.

Getting married didn't fix anything, however. Within days, she fell into a deep depression. At age 29, she underwent heart bypass surgery for a condition that she believes was aggravated by stress.

Jones was 29 when she told her parents about the abuse. She spoke with several family members before writing her book. She was shocked to learn that some knew the abuse was taking place at the time. Others were victims like herself.

Jones will be signing copies of *The Enemy Between My Legs* from 2-4 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 22, at Waldenbooks in Fairlane Town Center in Dearborn. People can reach her confidentially by using the "contact" link at stephanieljones.com or e-mailing stephanie@stephanieljones.com. Two other Web sites she finds helpful are childabuse.com and stopitnow.com.

<http://www.hometownlife.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071209/NEWS16/712090591>