

The Survivors Project

The Inspiration:

People ask me why I started this project and what inspired me to do this work. One of the first questions people ask is “are you a survivor”? The answer to that question is, yes, but it is not my status as a survivor that makes me create these photographs. I was a survivor for many years before I came upon this calling. What really inspired me was a group of women that were in the Sexual Assault Survivors Group that I counseled / facilitated in 2003. I was fresh out of graduate school and doing my best to use what I had learned along the way. It was my first group. It started slowly and sometimes weeks would come where only one person showed up. Finally the group began to build and people started to return each week. They became invested in each other and came to to know each other deeply. Pretense was generally left at the door and inside our room they shared tears, disappointments, hopelessness, laughter, shame, rage and fear. They shared past histories as well as the futures that they thought they were going to have but that now had to be rewritten.

They showed me that everything that I thought I knew about survivors fell short of what it really was all about. They showed me that true strength often comes from complete vulnerability. That “surviving” is an arduous process in which you strip yourself down to the emotional bones only to rebuild a stronger and more enlightened self. I saw that if you make the commitment to face the demons of your past and choose not to merely “cope” but to transform that you can have a life in which you flourish.

For some of the women in my group their crime happened in childhood and they kept it quiet for many, many years. For others, their first day in the group was “the day after”. It doesn’t matter how long ago it was, what matters most is that you reach out and commit yourself to making it out of the darkness and shame. I can assure you that your life will never be the same. You have likely lost things that you never wanted to lose and gained things that you never asked for. I can also say with confidence that you can have an amazing life that is filled with happiness and truth. You can create a new you. It is difficult and it requires honesty and a willingness to stop running, turn around and face your demons. I hope the people in these images inspire you as much as they have inspired me.

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