

# *The Survivors Project*

About this project: There are many myths and misconceptions about sexual assault, molestation and incest; not the least of which is that people simply believe that it could never happen to them. Either they believe that they are too smart to be preyed upon or that they are somehow otherwise immune. Despite the fact that it is more common to be raped by someone that you know than by someone that you don't know, many people still hold on to an image of rape- a woman walking alone is grabbed by a crazed lunatic. Sexual Assault is not limited to dark nighttime streets. It is a very harmful misconception that a "careful" person can protect oneself against rape. The truth is, it is just easier to believe that it happens to "other people".

Sexual assault happens to all kinds of people. The statistics are overwhelming, one in four women and 1 in 6 men will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. Rapes have occurred in all types of situations and it is time to open the eyes of society.

I have begun working on a project to celebrate, commemorate, and document survivors of sexual assault, molestation and incest. The photographs are black and white portraits, taken in a setting that is personal and meaningful to the survivor. Under each final image, there will be a statement. Each participant will have an opportunity to write whatever it is they would like to say. It could be a message of hope, a story about their experience, who they are as a person, or whatever they feel like would help the viewers understand who they are and what has happened to them.

With these images, I hope to show that sexual assault is indiscriminate and that the survivors are a varied group of people from all walks of life. I hope that the viewers of these images see that this is a crime that affects us all as a society and that no one is immune. In fact, everyone knows a survivor; they just may not know that it happens to be their spouse, friend, co-worker, parent, significant other or child.

For those of you that choose to participate in this project, I realize that it may be a "coming out" in a sense. You may have kept this event in your life a well-guarded secret. I hope that you will consider this project and how your bravery and willingness to come forth may allow another person to make that same leap and seek counseling.

Consider a person who views these images who has been assaulted/molested though they have kept it hidden. Perhaps they have not reported it to the police or shared the story with a friend. Maybe they are so sure that they are the only one that the secret has been kept inside and no help has been sought. Maybe seeing the faces of others who have also survived will inspire them to begin the healing process. Shame is insidious and so many retreat into despair and self-blame. I want to try and release survivors from that blame and put the blame where it belongs- on the perpetrator. Maybe a visitor will see these images and realize how easily it could have been their own spouse, child or parent in these photos and that it is not other people but all people who are at risk. Maybe that same person will become more active politically or financially and there begins the roots of change and progress. I want survivors to join in fellowship with each other and tell the world what is really happening and who it is happening to.

## **About The Photographer**

I volunteered at HAWC (The Houston Area Women's Center) for two years. During that time, I facilitated the sexual assault survivors group and counseled victims of domestic violence. I have been a photographer for over 15 years. In addition to working professionally as a photographer, I also taught photography at The High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, Episcopal High School and The Emery Weiner School. If you would like to learn more about me, and have access to the internet, please visit my website: <http://www.farahbraniff.com>.

**If you are interested in participating in this project or have any questions, please contact me directly at the number listed below.**

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