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# Child sex abuse survivor exemplifies need for change

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Bill White  
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Kristen Pfautz Woolley of York is a textbook example of lots of things, most of them inspiring.

Of using traumatic events to build something very positive, for one. Of emerging from childhood sexual abuse not as a victim, but as a strong survivor who wants to help others find that same path. Of courage, determination, compassion, healing.

I'll touch on all of those. But I want to focus first on Woolley as a textbook example of why Pennsylvania needs a two-year window for child sex abuse victims to bring civil suits in cases barred by our statute of limitations laws. She is among the advocates who have been urging state representatives to support Monday's attempt to amend another proposed child sex abuse-related law, scheduled for consideration in the state House, so that it includes that crucial two-year window that will save future victims.

Woolley was molested by a family friend through ages 10 to 12, while he was in his 20s. She didn't tell anyone about it because she wanted to protect her mother, who was in a fragile emotional state, and because she was afraid of being humiliated in school.

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She ran across him again when she was 17, and he made a frightening remark about his own newborn daughter's anatomy. "It haunted my soul," she told me.

Still, it wasn't until she was 23 years old, suffering from panic and anxiety attacks and receiving therapy for her problems, that she began opening up about it, and by the time she actually tried to report what had happened to authorities, she was past the statute of limitations as it existed at the time of these crimes. By then, she specifically knew about at least two other victims and was certain there were more.

When she told her mother — who died of a heart attack within weeks afterward, in a way confirming Woolley's long ago fears — she learned that her mother had been abused as a child, too.

Frustrated that the criminal justice system was powerless, Woolley took the incredibly courageous step of asking this guy to lunch and confronting him about what he had done. He denied it, but she threatened that if she learned he was doing this to anyone else, she would put her story on the front page of the newspaper.

She's convinced that if she could just get his name and her story out there, other victims — young enough not to be blocked by the statute of limitations — would come forward to put him away so he

## ABOUT BILL WHITE

Bill White is a columnist for The Morning Call in Allentown, PA. His column appears in The Morning Call and themorningcall.com on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.



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can't hurt anyone else. Otherwise, she figures he has decades left in his life to prey on more children.

Like many of these survivors, she doesn't care about the money. In fact, she and others have told me they're willing to see the proceeds from these suits capped in some way or restricted to mitigating the damage done by the abuse.

Rather, she talked about the idea that when a child is violated, her soul is murdered. "That really spoke to me," she said. "The moment you're violated, you feel you don't matter, you have no worth. Now that I know that I do matter and I do have worth, to hold him accountable publicly for violating me would be very, very healing.

"The most important thing for me is that everybody's story matters. I would love to have my day in court to tell it. If we could just open that door, it might help someone else find their voice and file criminal charges against him. I'm concerned about future victims."

What I find most inspiring about Woolley is that she has channeled her suffering toward healing others, ultimately by creating a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping other adult female child sex abuse survivors find peace and healing. It's called [Turning Point](#).

I loved what she said about this in an online blurb I found.

"I am the founder of Turning Point Women's Counseling and Advocacy Center," she wrote, "and I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. I know what it feels like to feel dirty, ashamed and guilt ridden; what it feels like to believe my abuse was all my fault. I worked very hard to reframe my mindset of being a victim to being a survivor. My dream of creating a safe, therapeutic environment dedicated to women survivors of childhood sexual abuse, a healing center where a woman can share her story, shed her shame and begin her healing journey has come to fruition. I would be honored to help you begin taking the steps toward healing."

I hope you'll add your voice to Woolley's by urging your state legislators to do the right thing Monday when this comes to the House floor.

Don't let them focus on the financial impact it might have on powerful institutions. Don't let them pretend scam artists and nuts will flood the courts with false claims. These are smoke screens.

This bill is about making sure the Kristen Woolleys of Pennsylvania finally get to name their abusers and tell their stories — and about saving other children from the same torment by dragging these pedophiles into the sunlight.

"This is not a partisan issue," she said. "It's a moral and ethical issue. We have a known perpetrator out there, and I can't name him. I could get *sued* if I name him. It's not right."

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Bill White's commentary appears Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

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