

“Home” Was Something to Survive

DeTachia Swain

BEFORE YOU READ:

This story references childhood sexual abuse. If you or someone you know has experienced sexual abuse, you can find help. Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673. Or visit RAINN at <https://rainn.org/>.

It Happened Every Weekend

Sometimes it happened on Friday night, sometimes it was on Saturday. I never knew exactly when, but I knew it would happen. My innocence was taken at the tender age of eight by my mother’s live-in boyfriend. The abuse continued until I was 12.

He would come into the house drunk, though as a child I didn’t understand what that meant. I would wake up to him on top of me, his hand over my mouth, whispering, *“You know if you tell your momma, she gonna whoop you.”* So I just lay there and cried. I couldn’t explain the pain between my legs. I didn’t know what was happening — only that it hurt.

Early Childhood

My mother became pregnant at 14 and gave birth at 15 — a beautiful baby girl. That was me. My grandparents believed she was too young to raise a child, so they decided I would live with an aunt and uncle.

When my mother turned 18, she took me back. I was three years old, full of energy and love, but suddenly surrounded by strangers. I cried nonstop, longing for the people I knew as my parents.

My mother was still young and not ready for the responsibility of a child. Every time she wanted to go out and have fun, my grandparents reminded her she had a child to care for. She took her anger out on me — with slaps, shoves, and harsh words.



Detachia (right) and her uncle

The Abuse Begins

I remember being three years old, my mother doing my hair. She pulled it roughly, hitting my head with the brush while yelling at me to sit still. I ran under the bed, crying. She swung the belt buckle underneath, striking at me while I clung tightly to the bed frame in fear. I was too young to recognize her actions as abuse. I just knew it hurt. Love and pain blur together when you’ve never been shown the difference.

My grandmother and mother were pregnant at the same time. My uncle is only two months older than I am. We grew up like siblings. We shared laughter and innocent fun, especially when we’d joke by calling each other “uncle” and “niece” in front of friends who didn’t understand. Those were the few good times I remember.

Growing Up Too Fast

Being the oldest of six, I had to cook, clean, and change diapers before school. At school, I couldn’t focus. Once, I got in trouble for talking in class. My teacher hit my hand with a ruler and made me clap erasers instead of eating lunch. When I got home, my mother beat me for “embarrassing” her. I was only eight.

By then, she was pregnant again, and we lived in a rundown apartment that should have been condemned. One night, while sleeping on

the bare floor, I woke to rats crawling over me. I screamed, and my mother beat me for waking her — then forced me to sleep outside.

Her abuse wasn't only physical. It was emotional too. She called me ugly, stupid, monkey-faced, told me she wished I'd never been born. She yelled at me in public, made sure I felt small. She never hugged me, never said she loved me.

That kind of pain doesn't show on the outside, but it lingers within. Verbal abuse bruises the soul. It steals your self-worth and leaves you doubting your value.

The Silent Years

Children who are abused by their parents become easy targets for others. I was no exception. I was terrified and conditioned to stay silent. Every weekend for four long years, it happened.

When I finally told my mother, she beat me. Just like he said she would. She accused me of trying to "steal her man." I was broken. When I finally spoke, my truth was met with violence. No one in my family helped. I left home at 14. I moved from house to house, trying to survive.

Adulthood and Healing

I never got counseling or therapy back then. Everything was buried deep inside.

I had my first son at 19, another at 22, and a daughter at 28 — my little doll, the one I never got to have as a child. I adored her, dressed her up, and spoiled her.

Then, one day, I woke up in a hospital after a seizure and an anxiety attack. Through therapy, I began to understand how years of abuse — verbal, physical, emotional, and sexual — had scarred me. I struggled to trust people. I wanted to protect my children so fiercely that I smothered them. My fear of them being harmed made it hard for me to let them live freely.

I battled depression and health issues, but faith and resilience kept me standing. God placed strong, loving women in my life who showed me what real love felt like. Who were these women? Let me say their names: Ma Sherry, Minister

Valerie, mentor Mayra, my therapist Rasheed, my godmother Gloria, Rev. Dottie, and Rev. DiOnetta.

It was hard to accept their love and guidance at first, but I embraced it. And sometimes I had to fight for it. For example, it wasn't easy to find a therapist who was right for me. I called a lot of numbers and hit a lot of dead ends. I finally found someone of African descent who I could relate to and trust. Her spirit was so uplifting and loving.

I am a fighter — not a casualty. I endured the "home" where I was brought up. My wounds are evidence of my resilience.

A Note to My Younger Self

You're beautiful.

I'm sorry.

It's okay.

I love you.

It's not your fault.

I'm here for you.

We will get through this.

You are a survivor.

Let me just hold you.

Never give up.

You are gifted, talented, and special.

I will always cherish you.

Always love yourself.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to DeTachia, what allowed the abuse to continue?

2. Why is it important for DeTachia to write a letter to her younger self? Try writing a letter to your younger self. What would you say?

DeTachia Swain is a HiSET student at Julie's Family Learning Program in South Boston, Massachusetts. She is 56 and has three adult children and eight beautiful grandchildren. She has had many setbacks this year, but that is not going to stop her from achieving what she sets out to do. She believes it's never too late to pursue your goals and create a better future.

