

My name is Jim Austin. I am a Social Worker for the Ontario Government, and I work at the Central East Correctional Centre in Lindsay.

I was in the audience in March 2008 when *Into The Light* was premiered. As a professional attending the Men of Courage conference, I was awed, and amazed at the strength displayed by the men in that film. To see their resolve, and commitment to overcome the effects of childhood sexual abused convinced me that, as a Social Worker, although we barely touch the subject in our work at the jail, we simply had to do a better job. Clearly, we have been missing the proverbial boat, and have been missing it for a long time. While we can assess, identify and refer to programs such as Anger Management, Addictions, AA and NA, until such time as we can assess who these men see themselves as, as men, we are going to continue to miss the boat. I was equally struck by the pain that was both audible, and visible in that large room during the presentation of *Into The Light*. It was raw, and palpable. Some was very obvious: people crying. Some was more hidden as people, both men and women looked down at the floor, or away from the focus of their attention, covering their eyes so as not to be seen by others. It goes without saying that there were undoubtedly victims in the room, still hiding their shame and guilt. Still feeling like it was their fault, and that they were alone with the history of being abused.

After the film was premiered, those men who displayed great courage in having their stories recorded then presented themselves for a panel in front of 300 plus total strangers, and proceeded to tell more of their stories, and to answer questions of an audience that was captivated by their resilience, and their belief in themselves. I was floored by the sheer guts, and determination it took to make oneself so vulnerable, and accessible, to total strangers, about an aspect of men's lives that is intensely private, and personal. These men clearly were leading by example, rejecting the historical sentence of shame and guilt that society would have them serve for being victims of sexual abuse and assault. These men were no longer victims. They were Survivors!

Immediately following the film and panel, I retreated to my hotel room with a colleague. I was in desperate need of a smoke. But instead of having a smoke, I began to shake. I couldn't have had a smoke if my life depended on it. I was shaking like a leaf. And for reasons unknown to me at that time, I turned to my colleague and said to him "That could have been my story". Never in my adult life had I told another person, a friend, a colleague, or even my wife of then 26 years, that I was sexually assaulted when I was a child.

What that conference, that film, those men did to me! What they did FOR me! I can't believe that I am here tonight saying what I am saying to you! I've never done this before. But because of that

conference, that film, and those men I was able to start my healing journey, to reclaim my life, and to learn to stop hiding what was done to me, not by me.

It wasn't immediate by any means. It took a few more months until I could actually face the reality of the Social Worker needing a therapist, a counsellor, himself. I found mine at our local sexual assault centre. What a gem she has turned out to be! I also became connected to, and a member of MaleSurvivor.org, an incredible web based support site for men, their spouses, lovers, friends and family to learn about male sexual abuse and assault, and to feel connected to one another. Feeling isolated, and alone with this history is so normal for survivors, but its also toxic. Shortly after I joined MaleSurvivor a man said to me that in order to heal, the man, and the man alone must make the decision to get on a healing path. But once on that path, he cannot walk it alone. He must have support. And boy, did I ever get support! And guess from whom? From a man in the movie Into The Light who is also active on the website. WOW!

Since then, I've told my wife about my abuse, and I've told our two sons. I've even become more active in the movement, while at the same time trying to maintain a level of safety and comfort for me. I've attended two Weekends of Recovery where I have been able to meet other men, just like me. I can't tell you what its like to finally feel like I belong, and that like Mike in the movie, I'm not an alien. That what happened to me, and the approximately 2.7 million other Canadian men was never our fault. And that, despite carrying my shame and guilt for 38 years, it is possible to heal, even after that length of time.

I'm not all the way there, though. Wherever that is. I may never be. All I know is, that as a result of Art Lockhart's work, the men of Into The Light, those visionary people at The Men's Project in Ottawa, and my ever present support system of my family, That I was finally able to tell someone else that I was sexually abused. I was heard, and not judged. I learned that what happened to me was not my fault. I learned that that I can be happy in my life, and that I am normal, while what happened to me was not. I learned that I am not alone.

I am so thankful for what has happened to me since I saw Into The Light. Right now, I am thankful; that after so many years, so many years, that I can live in a secret free home. A home where I can be; just me.

Thank you to all for attending tonight. For showing your support of men. For showing your support for men's healing. We can't do it alone. We need you to help us on our healing journey. To be there, for us.

To hold us, to help us cry and say what needs to be said. To hear us, and not judge us for what happened to us. To believe us, and to believe in us. We CAN do this!

Thank you.