

“The Grassroots Connection,” National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

“A Survivor’s Story” – Video & DVD Review

Everyday we are moved by the courage, action and determination of survivors. We hear their stories, validate their experiences, and remind them of the power and strength it took for them to be where they are today. Survivors are driven in their own unique ways to embark on an amazing journey of healing from abuse. “A Survivor’s Story” captures all this and much more.

As she tells her story from the perspective of a child, Olga Trujillo, a nationally recognized speaker and trainer, reminds viewers of the seemingly counter-intuitive ways survivors endure. Her personal history, which takes place in a world ravaged by violence, is a story that can impact traditional beliefs that minimize survivors’ abilities to thrive. Olga’s apparently passive coping techniques are, in fact, quite the opposite. She is quite deliberate in her will to live through years of torture. Other survivors may find hope and solace in her experience.

“A Survivor’s Story” is divided into four segments – witnessing, childhood, adolescence and healing – depicting a retrospective complete with photos and a compelling narrative telling the story behind the images. Each segment portrays Olga’s feelings, experiences and survival techniques she employed to lead to her ultimate healing. Everyone who hears her pain will learn from her journey and pass along compassion to all survivors.

An opportunity to show and discuss “A Survivor’s Story” with a captive audience should not be missed. The video comes with some suggested discussion questions to help shape meaningful conversations. This video is an excellent resource for volunteer and advocate trainings at community-based domestic violence programs, community awareness events, criminal justice trainings or anyone who works on behalf of child and adult survivors of domestic and sexual violence. It can also be used in support groups with survivors to help alleviate feelings of isolation, give them new insight on their situation, and provide an understanding of their children’s experiences.

Sexual Assault Report, Civic Research Institute

Outstanding A-V Training Material “A Survivor’s Story”

In *A Survivor’s Story*, 45 minutes, © 2004, Olga Trujillo has generously and courageously shared her most amazing story on DVD and video. It is the best depiction that I have ever seen of the overlap between domestic violence (DV) and sexual assault (SA), and, as such, is an excellent training material for anyone learning about DV, SA and incest, and the overlap between them. SAR heartily recommends the tool for use in training staff of DV, SA, and child protection professionals, schools, child advocacy programs, as well as law enforcement, judges, prosecutors, clergy, therapists, custody evaluators, nurses, and students in any of the above fields. The material is so rich that both beginners and the most advanced professionals can well learn much from it.

Without revealing her whole story, Olga, the youngest of three children, and the only girl, watched from a young age as her father repeatedly and brutally beat, strangled, raped and threatened to kill her mother. As a very young child, Olga couldn’t take seeing her mother’s injuries and hearing her mother’s moaning. So she begged her father to stop. Her father promised to stop if he could rape her. Thereafter she led the hellish existence of being raped every night by her own father. Coming from a family that spoke only Spanish, Olga only once dared seek help, and that sadly backfired very badly, ending any efforts on her part to get help. Though she was isolated, several adults in her life still acted as her guardian angels. One was a neighbor, who knowing that her father beat the children, invited her over for food treats, letting her know there was a place she could feel better about herself outside her home. Another acted like a big sister to her.

Sadly, her father’s death when she was 11 years old did not end the horrors she had to endure. Instead her brothers took over abusing her, adding severe humiliation as well.

Amazingly, Olga prospered at school, going to college and doing well professionally. Yet her background came back to haunt her in different ways and at different times as she grew up. Like many child sexual abuse survivors she made some bad choices as a teenager and young adult, and had little ability to protect herself from other victimization. Amazingly, despite all that she went through, she became a well respected sexual assault expert in her professional life, and she uses her knowledge to make this remarkable and courageous film of her life. Olga is truly a survivor who has finally found balance and inner peace after 12 intensive years of therapy. At the end she shares a few pictures of herself now, finally leading a safe and healthy life, one filled with loving and supportive friends. Alas, there has been no reconciliation with her family, which is still in denial and wanting to cover up any shame to the outside world.

The film is closed captioned for the deaf and hard of hearing, and is divided into four sections: Witnessing, Childhood, Adolescence and Healing. That means the sections can be shown separately for specific audiences or when there is little time available (e.g. during a police roll-call), or as an excellent introduction for a presentation.

Olga Trujillo is also an excellent speaker available for keynote addresses or workshops. She is able to tailor her presentation to the needs of the audience she is addressing.