

Crook, L. (1995). Letter from Lynn Crook. Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, Vol. 4(2), 115-118.

I am writing in response to sociologist Ofshe's article, "Making Grossly Damaging but Avoidable Errors: The Pitfalls of the Olio/Cornell Thesis" (1994). Ofshe appears to use distortions in his descriptions and statements. Olio and Cornell (1994) exposed some of Ofshe's misrepresentations in the Ingram case, but Ofshe has continued in his most recent writings. Since some of his assertions and distortions concern my case and me, I felt compelled to write this letter.

It was never my intention that my civil suit would appear in a book by a board member of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation. According to Ofshe's account in his recent book *Making Monsters* (Ofshe & Waters, 1994), my recovered memories were devastating for me and my future appears grimly unsettled. Not so!

Ofshe testified as an expert witness for the defense in a trial that I won against my parents in Kennewick, Washington on March 4, 1994. In preparing my case for his publication, Ofshe titled this chapter after one of the court documents, "Life with Father," and changed all our names except my brother's. He included dozens of accurate details from court documents: that in 1988 I was a 45-year-old mother of two and working as an educational coordinator in a rape crisis center, that I was awarded \$150,000 by the judge, and that my favorite childhood story was about the day the dolls came alive. Then Ofshe took a bold step. To substantiate that my memories were not repressed but "created," Ofshe did precisely what he criticized "bad therapists" of doing: he modified, omitted, and fabricated evidence. This is similar to what Olio and Cornell (1994) have described in the Ingram case.

Ofshe's modified version states that I read *Courage to Heal* (Bass & Davis, 1988) prior to my memories emerging (p. 126), that I underwent several relaxation/hypnosis sessions (p. 124), that I contacted the local newspaper so they would cover my story (p. 135), and that my sister's and my memories "evolved" (p. 135). Court documents reflect my actual experience and tell a different story. I read *Courage to Heal* several months after my memories began to emerge. A single relaxation session occurred only after several months of therapy during which I tried, unsuccessfully, to recover happy memories. I did not contact the local newspaper. My sister's never-repressed memory did not "evolve" to include our father as the abuser.

The evidence that Ofshe omits is also startling! He neglects to mention that my father, a physician, stated under oath that he did not know whether or not it was sexual abuse if a father had his daughter touch his penis. Ofshe omits a letter from my mother to my sister in which my mother states that my father would "always be in denial." Ofshe neglects to mention the many documented boundary violations in our family, that my father treated his adult daughter for genital warts even though there were other physicians available, that he frequently grabbed our buttocks, that a sister had to dress in a closet because our father would enter her bedroom while she was dressing, that he said to my then 12-year-old sister, "Keep your legs together or I'll think you want me," or that he discussed with the sexual position that our mother preferred. These boundary violations are consistent with the behavior of an offender and were a part of what supported my attorney's, my expert witness' and the judge's conclusion that my father had sexually abused us.

The thoughts and feelings Ofshe attributes to me are his own fabrication. I did not have "another vaguer reason for entering therapy" (p. 123), I did not believe that the lawsuit was "far from healing" (p. 135), nor did I take the judge's decision as a "defeat" and sob "inconsolably" (p. 137) when a reporter asked me what I thought of the decision. Furthermore, his account of my activities since the trial is absurd. I was not convinced that I "probably possessed a whole new set of memories" (p. 138) nor did I sign up "for a therapy retreat determined to follow these new dark clues" (p. 138).

Ofshe cannot ethically substantiate that my memories were "created." Therefore, given my testimony, the incriminating testimony of my parents, and the corroborating testimony of my sisters and expert witnesses, we can logically conclude, as Judge Yule did, that I was sexually abused by my parents and that I had repressed this abuse for decades.

An excerpt from the judge's decision (Proceedings before the HONORABLE DENNIS D. YULE, Superior Court Judge, in and for the County of Benton, on the 4th day of March 1994, at Kennewick, Washington) clarifies Ofshe's position in this case.

Dr. Ofshe characterizes plaintiff's memories as progress toward ritual, satanic cult images, which he states fits a pattern he has observed of false memories. It appears to the Court, however, that in this regard, he is engaging in the same exercise for which he criticizes therapists dealing with repressed memory. Just as he accuses them of resolving at the outset defining repressed memories of abuse and then constructing them, he has resolved at the outset to find a macabre scheme of memories progressing toward a satanic cult ritual and then creates them. (p. 27)

My experience since the trial? As a child I was taught by my parents that people would think I was crazy if I disclosed. In disclosing, I overcame my biggest fear and discovered new strengths in myself, learned I am worthy of love, and regained my power and my sexuality. While I still have years missing from my childhood, I feel under no pressure to recall those times. I am finding ways to deal with the chronic disabilities of post-traumatic stress disorder. I acknowledge that where I am now is a consequence of where I have been and the choice I have made.

The False Memory Syndrome Foundations claims that an inexperienced, overzealous or unethical therapist could false convince a highly suggestible, very damaged client that he or she was victimized by childhood sexual abuse. This may be true in very unusual cases. However sexual abuse of children is common, delayed recall of sexual abuse is clinically well-documented, and the denial of an accused offender does not necessarily means that the memories were "created."

I believe that if the recovered memory debate is ever to be resolved, professionals on both sides must commit to represent their viewpoints in an accurate, responsible manner. Unscholarly accounts, such as those by Ofshe, will result only in further misleading the media and polarizing the debate. With accused offenders now vigorously claiming "Your therapist or Courage to Heal implanted those memories!," Making Monsters and Ofshe's articles support our society's historic unwillingness to accept and deal with the horror of childhood sexual abuse.

Finally, I have a message for therapists who, despite the current controversy, continue to see clients they suspect were sexually abused. We are in therapy with you and that is the good news! Affirm to yourself from time to time that adults do bizarre and horrible things to children. Remember that somehow we survived. Remember that we know at some level that our survival techniques no longer work. Remember that our trauma was repressed for a very good reason and that you may trust us to recall as much as we need to recall in our own way and at our own pace.

References

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Author Note

Lynn Crook, MEd, successfully sued her parents for damages resulting from incest in a delayed memory case in Washington State. [Single or multiple copies of this article are available from the Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (EST).]