

In the Absence of Answers

Imagine being 8 years old. Your best friend is your dad, and your favorite pastime is playing with your cousins. Every day is an adventure at a different family member's house, surrounded by new cousins, toys, and endless joy. Laughter fills the air, and conversations flow without end. You run barefoot outside, carefree, while your homeschooling is guided by your dad—just like every child's dream. Until one day, your dad disappears.

Meet A.D. a 22-year-old social work student from Midland Michigan. “My childhood was a huge catalyst for me becoming a social worker,” A.D. says. Her father was a part of the estimated [4-6%](#) of Americans who have been falsely accused of a crime. “When you are only 8, you don't really notice or question your parent's absence,” she said.



The [Midland](#) County Courthouse, Midland Michigan.

When A.D. was only 8 years old, her older sibling falsely accused her father of molestation. “My mom had my sister five days before she turned sixteen, we grew up with totally different lives” “Her dad was out of the picture.” She paints her sister's childhood as free and rule-less until A.D.'s father came into the picture. “She was old enough to see the difference between how we were raised,” A.D. says. A.D.'s father had previously served a small sentence for a drug-related crime. After his time in Jail, he decided to reform his life. He moved the family to a better neighborhood and became a youth pastor.

“When my parents wouldn't let my sibling see their significant other, they decided to move out, they were 17 or 18 at this point, but my mom was still heartbroken,” she said. When A.D.'s mother refused to divorce her husband at her sibling's request, things turned ugly. “A few months after my siblings moved out they came to my mom saying they had something to tell her.” “She told my mother she had been molested by my father”. A.D. said. Her mom's first order of business was to lawyer up and kick her father out of the house. When A.D. mother told her sibling that they were headed for trial their exact words were, “That's not what I wanted”. This

raised many alarms for A.D., whose family had already started to isolate her due to the nature of the incident.

A.D. never got to testify in court. She explained that her sibling's lawyer wanted to talk to A.D. and prepare her for the case. "Their lawyers asked me if my dad ever touched me or saw me naked." "Of course, I said yes, he was my stay-at-home dad giving me a bath like any other kid," A.D. said. Once that happened, she explained that her dad knew he would not stand a chance in court, especially as a black man with a criminal record and a public defender. So he took a plea deal to serve 10 years instead of 20 years. A.D. wants to highlight that there was no physical evidence brought to court. It was word of mouth vs word of mouth.

After serving 8 years, her father got out. The road ahead for A.D. was not easy though. Her family was divided. "We had supervised visits until I turned 18, due to his parole." "He had lost me from 8 to 18," she said. She tells us how hard it was for her father to see her as an adult since so much time had passed. "When I was a kid, they pitied me but as I got older and continued to support my father, it turned into poor A.D. She's so brainwashed." she tells. The relationship with her family is vague. A.D. holds many boundaries with her family now, she explains that her cousins her age were the only family members who stood on her side.

"If I could tell anyone anything about this situation, I would say the same thing I wanted to say as a child." "If something was going on I would have known." A.D. says, "As a social worker, I know this narrative can sometimes be harmful, but now that I work in child welfare I see how victims of sexual abuse act out." she said. One of the consistencies throughout A.D.'s story is that no one stopped to ask her what was going on. Not one family member stopped to ask her her side of the story. A.D. carries that with her every day. "I can't talk about it with my family without being shut down." she said. "I just wish my family would have asked me."