

Marie knows first hand the devastating effects of sexual abuse. She became a victim as a child while she was a patient at a children's hospital, but the perpetrator wanted to continue the abuse and to do that he took intimate photographs of her.

She says: "My abuser didn't use force or threats, he just made me feel very stupid. He laughed at me for resisting. I went along with what he wanted because I really felt I had no choice. "Of course, years later I realised the differential in power between adults and children but at the time I didn't understand any of that. I do remember to this day, although it's a lifetime ago, how I felt being photographed, how humiliated and how physically sick I felt."

What happened to her altered the course of her life, in ways both large and small. She was wearing a nightdress at the time of the abuse; she has worn only trousers ever since. She couldn't speak about what had happened to her for many years.

Marie recalls: "When I left hospital and went home I wasn't the same child who'd gone into hospital. The sexual abuse sort of faded from my mind but the photographs he'd taken never left me. I became obsessed and over anxious about them. I worried that my parents and my school friends would see them. Every time at school I saw children laughing I thought they had seen them and knew what I had done.

"Of course, we all know that children who've had this done to them don't tell anybody. I didn't want to tell anyone because I had done something I wanted nobody to know anything about. The anxiety got to be so immense I couldn't handle it any more and pushed it all down. "I turned in on myself and turned away from family and friends and everyone around me. Instead of being an outgoing, happy child I became very introspective. I didn't trust anybody and felt a bad person and very worthless.

"By the time I was 16 I was receiving medication for panic attacks. Over my lifetime I suffered many, many bouts of severe depression. I developed agoraphobia; I couldn't leave the house for three or four years. In my early 20s I abused the prescription medication, taking them with alcohol, and I really didn't care what happened to me. I felt totally unimportant and I didn't think anyone would mind if I just disappeared.

"I was lucky, I got married and I had a son. My husband supported me wonderfully but he didn't know why I was like I was. He had to be mother and father to our son. I felt like a bad wife and mother. I couldn't hold down a job or a career. The guilt was extreme. I never really forgot about those photographs.

"After three decades I revealed my abuse for the first time. Strangely, I spoke about my abuse but I didn't mention the photos. Somehow I thought people would understand me being physically, sexually abused but that somehow photographs they would think were my fault. When my abuser was finally prosecuted my only question for him was what had he done with the photographs.

"It was only when I went into 18 months of therapy, and we did a lot of work around the photography, that I began to get my life back. Now every day when I wake up it's a day to look

forward to, but I wish I had got help earlier. My family had to put up with so many problems, it wasn't just me who was affected.

"Thirty years of my life were wasted. I struggled from one day to the next with no idea why I felt as I did other than I deserved it because really I was a very unpleasant person, a nasty, bad, dirty person and probably not worth a good life. But by having therapy and the proper help I was able to understand that I was in control of my life and that events around me didn't control me.

"I felt my abuse continued as long as those photographs were out there. It's hard to get people to understand that abusive images are not a victimless crime. That child has feelings that are doing harm to them and will stay with them forever if nothing is done."