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AARON cont'd from page 7

sadness in Aaron's parents, in my parents, and knowing the heartbreak and despair we all felt at not doing our job, not protecting our loved one. These haunting questions led me to research child abuse and the things I learned broke my heart yet again. I learned that the abuser is most likely to be a trusted family friend or a family member. I learned one in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before the age of 18. That 70% of child abusers have between one and nine victims. That 20% have 10 to 40 victims. That an average serial abuser can have as many as 400 victims. That over 30% of victims never disclose the experience to ANYONE, and of those who do disclose, 75% do it accidentally. Is there comfort in knowing that our family is not alone in not knowing? No. None at all.

Learning these things and realizing the "stranger danger" that I taught my children would be of little use in most situations led to my panicked phone call to my son, who is away at Graduate school. Asking him point blank, "have you ever been sexually abused?" A sigh of relief when he responded that he hadn't, the surprise when he asked me the same question. Thinking yes, he is right, according to the statistics it needs to be a conversation that everyone has no matter parent or child. Then remembering that 30% never disclose leads me to ask again and again to ensure that his response was truthful.

Later it hit me, what if he had said yes? What if my daughter had said yes? What if the answer had been yes, and a friend or family member that I loved and trusted was named, what would I do? In that moment I knew. In that moment I realized that I could kill. Me, a person who has never intentionally killed anything, not even bugs. Me, the person who catches and releases any insects I find in my home. Me, the law-abiding, rational person I thought myself to be, realized that I could kill.

I don't know exactly what happened the night of February 8, 2009. From what I do know Aaron didn't go to Darrell's with the intent of killing him. But if he had I now understand. I understand it is possible for a good person to kill.

In these last 367 days some questions have been answered, but many others have arisen. Why didn't the police investigate? How is it possible that we as a society allow one in four girls and one in six boys to be sexually abused? How could the Deputy DA on Aaron's case even utter the words describing

the abuse testimony as "self-serving" and "irrelevant"? Why are there so many abusers in our society? How does a person become so messed up that they can rape children? Why does our justice system not work? Why is the DA so intent on sending Aaron to prison for 50-years-to-life, knowing Darrell's family is supporting him? How do we stop all forms of child abuse? How do we protect every child?

During these 367 days Aaron's sister, Mindy, has been tirelessly working on his behalf. She started a website called SaveAaron.com, which provides information on Aaron's case and on recognizing and preventing child abuse. She's contacted numerous media organizations trying to get the word out, and she has organized several fundraisers. She's told me of the many, many people who've contacted her and shared their own stories of abuse and who write to Aaron. Tirelessly she is working to bring her brother home, to raise awareness, to protect every child. She is working hard to end the silence of child abuse, and I wonder, why aren't we all?

Rhonda Wilson, Fort Bragg

DUTRA cont'd from page 1



invertebrates, and at the same time to filter impaired water going to San Francisco Bay. At the same time, it provides an area for dredged river sediments. Last month, National Geographic's Sustainable Tourism Website announced that Petaluma Wetlands has been selected as a geo-tourism destination.

The issues are too complex to be explored in this space, but the public is encouraged to attend this most important meeting, which has been postponed numerous times due to shifting information. Extensive information as well as argument from both points of view are available on these websites:

Dutra: petalumaasphaltplant.com/
 "Save Shollenberger Park" coalition: www.saveshollenberger.com/

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