

Jaime,

I wanted to explain some things that you may not have known. In fact, what is very important is to know how and why we were not given the opportunities for our families to get to know each other better. What I mean is that your grandmother and my mother were sisters. Your grandmother was 8 years older than my parents and you and I were more like peers from the same generation, or close to that. Growing up you were 6 or so years younger than me, I think. Maybe more. My parents had a disagreement of some sort with your grandmother. The details of which I never understood. It is unfortunate that I did not get to learn more about it and I didn't ask more questions. I'll explain why. First, it was awkward. Your grandmother was my aunt and out of respect I couldn't ask anything about what might have happened in the past.

Sometimes families impose rules that get repeated over and over and we don't realize that some of the rules do not serve the best interests of everyone. Learning from the past and from mistakes helps to grow and change things for the better. Pretending that something didn't happen or that it wasn't as big a deal as it was, causes people to question their feelings and not know how to make sense of one's life and our closest relationships. At some point, when growing up we discovered we had a larger family. It included your mother and her sisters and their mother, my aunt. It was great. I had more friends and people I liked. I very much looked forward to each get together. It wasn't just because I was shy and didn't have a lot of friends. I had a larger family. I had second cousins my age when we were growing up. I looked forward to every birthday, holiday and more.

The problem was that we were made to feel guilty for looking forward to these times. I didn't understand why at the time. I was being told that these get togethers were not such a big deal to you, Dan, Barbara, Tracy. You, your parents and your aunt had more important things in your life than to think about spending time with us. You were my second cousin but that's just a technicality. Second cousin is cousin and you were important to me. When I got older, I remember being told to call up my cousins because they won't want to take me into their home. That never helped my self-esteem. I was asked why I like you and your family so much. Looking back, I realize I should not have had to answer such questions. If I was the parent instead of the son, I'd wonder how I should change if I thought my son was too interested in another part of the family.

There is a book called "The Body Keeps the Score." In terms of physical abuse growing up, I had a total of over one hundred instances of physical abuse by age 18. If I as a parent had done that to my son or daughter even once, I'd spend years making amends. I'd write one hundred apologies. One hundred instances of physical abuse growing up, no acknowledgement or apology from Mom and Dad. A child might imagine one instance, two, maybe even 10 instances. They might imagine that it was just normal parental punishments on a few of those occasions. Spankings for being bad. The fact is that even as a child, I figured out that all these instances of abuse were not normal or right. They were unpredictable and unexpected. They went from not making sense when I was youngest, as to why it was happening, to realizing it was totally crazy and wrong... unacceptable.

I recently asked my sister to make it right for me. I asked her to help me shape this story so that no further hurt comes to Mom and Dad's memory or some way to tell the truth and cause the least amount of harm to everyone. Unfortunately, she has seemed to signal to me, as best I can tell, that there is no good way to fix this. Any mistake that might have occurred a few years back that seemed to be a malicious act on my part, was collateral damage for the hurt I experienced.

I used to try to tell your mother, and her sisters and your grandmother about the abuse – physical, as well as emotional, and psychological as well as neglect. I was told that my cousins didn't care so much about me and I wanted. "Why don't you go live with them?" I was asked. I was confused back then because I thought that I had explained to your mother enough. The problem was that I was told things that originally made me confused as to whether I was justified in claiming that your mother should help get me out of the home. I should have privately said, "this is what happened. It is wrong, isn't it? You can do something, maybe. Please!" I absolutely am not blaming your mother. I was never mad at your mother and never had a chance to explain everything. The reason I never explained everything is the same reason I put off writing this letter to you. I was made to question my real experiences. That was not something your family did, I mean it wasn't something your mother, her sisters or your grandmother did. It was what happened in our home.

We are told, "move on." "Don't hold grudges." "You are weak for letting this affect your life." "You can't forgive." When I confronted Mom about the abuse, in one instance, she made light of my statement and said, "what were you sexually abused." "Was I going to tell people that?" Of course, I wasn't sexually abused. Why would that even come up? It was done to have me question the seriousness of what I was bring up. It was like saying that repeated unpredictable physical abuse was not bad enough to worry about it. I shouldn't let it get to me.

Even into adulthood I had dreams of childhood and telling your family more about what happened. I wanted to stay with your mother when I was growing up. It was embarrassing to admit. It's embarrassing even now. When I went off to college, I went all the way to Georgia. I thought about my aunt Maureen, your mother, Linda, Karen, Tracy, Barbara, Dan and you. I got into the co-op program where I could go to school for one quarter and then go to work at a company that is in the Electrical Engineering field. I found a company up in Massachusetts. I would come down on the weekends. I told myself that Dan was cousin and good friend. You were a bit young at the time but still fun to visit. I hoped so much that your mother didn't mind me assuming I could just come visit and stay there every weekend.

In a way, I needed a little more time before totally moving on as an adult into an independent role as an adult. This is information that has taken me a great deal of time to process, understand and explain. So, I can understand if it might sound unusual to hear from your male cousin, Bruce. I don't know how you thought of me when I was 19, 20 or 21. At that time, you were well, a kid, and not like a peer as Dan was. Don't get me wrong, I liked you and loved seeing you. I would have been lucky to have known you as an adult or a peer, if that makes sense. When I was around 19 and you were maybe 10, 11 or something like that, it's just not appropriate to hang out with you at that time.

I needed what your mother offered. Kindness and being welcomed. Family. When I went off to Georgia Tech, I needed more of that than the limited weekend holiday and birthday get togethers. Plus, I needed to believe that I had a family that wanted to see me and welcomed me. Treated me like a friend... a source of comfort. Maybe I should have asked if it was okay to just come each weekend and show up and let my way inside. I always felt a bit unsure. I should have asked. I was a bit embarrassed that I did that. I mean I think your mother did say it was okay. I remember her saying that Dan's big dog won't bother me, just come inside.

You had such a messy room, I remember, and so did Dan. I wasn't sure how thrilled Dan was about my visiting every weekend. That embarrassment was made worse when I lost touch with both of

you at some point. I hated that we lost touch. To be honest, I wasn't sure that Dan was thrilled at having me as a best friend or good friend. I just wasn't sure. I was afraid he was accepting me because we were cousins. Maybe you can ask him for me. Ask him what I should talk to him about. Tell him how much I appreciated his friendship and how lucky I felt to have him as a cousin and I can only wish I had known you when you grew up and not just when you were so young. I hope that makes sense. I just wanted to be clear that it wasn't just Dan that I liked, and it was a fact that you were younger than me and like a kid at the time, just at that time. Since, Dan and I hung out, I don't like him thinking I forgot him and blew him off later. I just don't know what to talk about now. What would I say to him? I'm embarrassed. It's because we hung out and then drifted apart. It wasn't what I wanted.

I pray for a miracle and I get to see you soon. My life has not always gone well. I wish you knew me more. I wish I knew what you thought about me.

As I was saying, the guilt and the things that I was told was that your mother, her sisters and that part of my family didn't have time for me and wouldn't let me move in there. I was literally told that. "Go live with Sharon or Karen, or Aunt Maureen... see if they want to take you in," those were the words I heard. I can honestly admit that it was exactly what I wanted as a kid. I had no way of asking if your mother would take me to live with them. I was never given a chance to find out if I was loved that much. She was Mom to you but "Sharon" to me as first cousin. So, I should have or wanted to ask, "Sharon, can I live with you? I am being honest," I wanted to say that literally, so she would know about what was happening. But I was made to believe I wasn't wanted. Your mother had no way of knowing when we were growing up.

If you ask Dan or Barbara, they might have memories of knowing about the abuse. Carrie will probably deny it to protect Mom. She will think there is no sense digging up this from the past. Bruce is just holding grudges. I am telling things that no one knew about it. One imagines that if it was that bad, someone would have known. That's not logical. Your mother was too loving, kind and protective to have known how much I was hurting to do nothing. The hurt was from the repeated and unexpected abuse. I kept trying to predict what caused the assaults. It hurt because I couldn't stop it from happening or figure out how to act exactly like what she needed. The problem is that if she didn't make me so uncomfortable, I would not have avoided her so much and she wouldn't get so upset at me not being a better son. She wants all this love and I couldn't give it because I was afraid of her or I had no coping strategy to avoid being hurt or hit. You can't fight back with my Dad or do anything when my mother attacked because being so shy, I didn't have a lot of friends or a sense of safety if I tried to leave and escape when I was just a kid.

I was made to believe that your mother didn't care for me that much. What is she going to do adopt me? Let me live her and your father or with Karen? I tried to move on when I went to college after high school, but to quote the book I read recently, "the body keeps the score." So, that's why you saw me those weekends when I came Massachusetts. I had a co-op job and would stay in Dan's room on the weekends.

Here is another embarrassing them. So, with Barbara it was helpful to make her seem so shallow that she would have no interest in spending time with me. She was pretty and would start dating and didn't realize how much her cousin needed her attention. In fact, to embarrass me even more, I was made to feel embarrassed like I wanted my cousin to be my girlfriend. I mean if I wanted to spend time with my cousin, and she happens to be pretty, by implication it's obvious that I could be

embarrassed for wanting to spend time with a cousin, my age... a cousin who is meeting guys also, for being her boyfriend. Of course, I just wanted a cousin. Of course, I had no interest in anything else.

Let me explain a bit better. Your mother was an adult when I first got to know her, as my first cousin. You, Dan, Tracy and Barbara were kids like I was growing up. In the case of Dan and Barbara, along with me, we were all teenagers. Wanting to spend time with all of you was perfectly okay. Other than the case where I want to see my cousin and she has a boyfriend and that makes her busy. No one would be embarrassed if we were teenagers and Dan had a girlfriend and was busy with his girlfriend, or a guy friend. But if I want to spend time with Barbara and she is busy, it could be embarrassing if someone suggests that I am attracted to my cousin.

That's taboo and a great way to shame a boy growing up. Tell him he is attracted to his cousin. To this day, that mere suggestion is so embarrassing that it has made it harder to talk to Barbara if I could talk to her. It's harder than talking to Dan after losing touch with him and not knowing what he thought of me, as cousin and friend. There was no reality to the idea that I had an interest in anything more than family, cousin, friend relationship with all my cousins. That was it. The family dynamics between your grandmother and my mother limited our contact. I wanted more contact with all of you. All kinds of methods were used to convince me that none of you were that interested in me. I was told that you all had your own lives and had better things to do than spend time with me or give me all the attention I wanted as a kid and even up to the age of 22 for me. You all had your own lives and I should grow up. That was the message.

Oh, if your mother had tried to step in and help, she likely would have been attacked and her motives would have been attacked. It would have made it harder for me to have any time with all of you, growing up, if I said that. I knew that. I know that would have happened because it was exactly what happened to me.

I knew I wanted someone to rescue me growing up. I knew that even as a kid I had more self-control than my parents had. As a kid, if I got in a fight with my sister, I stopped myself before I hit her or hurt her. I was a kid and typically kids have less control than an adult. It's a fact. I went into Social Work because it seemed like a great way to help people that might be vulnerable. I wasn't cutout for law enforcement. I was shy so to overcome shyness I learned how to be a person that could work directly with people. On one visit to my parents, after not seeing my brother in many years I met him, his wife and children. I was not at my best psychologically and so the memories from the past abuse were returning. My brother had been my friend. I liked him. I thought he was great. I didn't want him to be hurt. Therefore, this is what I mean when I say I know what would have happened if your mother was told everything that was happening to me when I was growing up. If I said too much maybe I wouldn't get to see all of you as much.

I saw a girl of about 3 or 4 years old, who initially saw me as a stranger and was afraid. Within 24 or more hours she wanted to go home with me and was asking me that many times. She most likely wanted to visit. Also, going through my mind is how when I was a Georgia Tech in Atlanta, GA, Carrie, your cousin, my sister, told me how Dad almost broke her arm and that next time they were going to call someone about this. She was between 18 and 20. I brought this up recently with her and she didn't dispute the facts. I had notes, diary entries, therapy entries, friends who could confirm the story I told over and over. I had letters I sent to others asking for advice. When my sister told me this, I was confused. I knew it was wrong. I was afraid and didn't know what she wanted. If I was too friendly with

Mom and Dad would Carrie be mad and think it didn't bother me that she was hurt? I didn't know what to do. I thought that was why she moved to CT... to get away from them.

When she said I was out to get John after that visit when I first met Emily, I thought that it was crazy. I didn't want to hurt my brother. When I noticed what things that Emily, my niece was saying, I could relate when I was a kid. I had wanted someone to investigate what was happening. I thought an anonymous call to Social Services will be an assurance that nothing is happening. I had every reason to believe nothing would come of the matter. I was certain I was over-reacting. I was so very sensitive that I saw abuse where there was none, I suppose. My sister would insist that when I saw Emily being held up against the wall, or was it pushed or shoved against the wall, there was no fear in her eyes. The most to come out of the matter was a few tips on how to solve a few frustrating things with a child. Nothing more.

Social Services completely over-reacted. The story I heard was that they called the police and threw him into a police car in hand-cuffs. There was nothing in my story to Social Services that would even remotely suggest bringing the police. I knew darn well my brother was not a dangerous person that a social worker should fear. I had reported on far worse and more certain cases of abuse where no police were ever involved... far worse people were confronted by one social worker, a woman and no police. Far, far worse had happened without any police being involved. I worked in the field of Social Work, so I had an educated and informed knowledge of how a situation might be handled. I had an informed reason to believe that the information I provided would not cause any kind of lasting harm. I wasn't just guessing. I wasn't trying to hurt my brother. I had a legal requirement to report any possible abuse even the most unlikely. Even if the chance was one half of one percent.

If I did see fear or possible abuse, it was because I had experienced it over one hundred times. I also had going through my mind, the events my sister had told to me about how scared she was that time when I was away at college. It was close to instinctual. My sister claimed to know what Emily wanted. I didn't have the advantage that she had. I could not know what Emily wanted. I did know what I wanted when I was a kid. I wanted to be protected. I remember this precious little girl hiding behind me when her dad looked mad at her. Maybe I just imagined it because I was a little boy once that wanted to hide from his parents. I guess my sister would answer that better. She had knowledge that my brother never hurt his children. She would have been better able to explain to me that maybe Emily just wanted to visit me. She could have explained that was what Emily was doing. This niece of mine was probably just a girl who thought her uncle would keep her from even getting trouble. Unfortunately, I never found out what my sister might have known... I never found out in time what would happen when I made the call. I just wanted, if this girl was in any way afraid that her parents get a few tips on how to not punish her in a way that might make her feel like I felt as an adult.

I didn't want a child to grow up with any anger at all at their parents. No one had a chance to prevent that possibility from happening to me. I wish I had not had the anger at Mom and Dad. It's a shame that John, became collateral damage. It's a shame that reality was so profoundly distorted. There was no need to involve the police or to break confidentiality. Any person that grows up in an abusive home, risks being overly sensitive. The expectation of confidentiality should prevent the damage of exposing an act and making it look like it is aimed at hurting my brother.

There was a time in my career where I had to commit people to a psychiatric hospital against their wishes because they were suicidal. Not once did anyone accuse me of being malicious or trying to

hurt them. I was working at a public mental health center when I did this. These same people saw my respect for them at all other times. They saw me advocate for them... I remember one situation where a guy was having bad side effects from a psychiatric medication. He told the psychiatrist and it was clear that he wasn't listening. I heard how the psychiatrist spoke about this guy in team meetings. I couldn't trust the doctor to listen and respect the patient or client enough to try a different medication for his problems. So, I informed him of his right to refuse medication. These are the same people who knew I was not acting maliciously when I had to commit them after a suicidal attempt. It was against their will. No one not once came back and asked for a different therapist.

My sister never listened to me when I tried to explain that I did not want to hurt John, my brother. I had good reason that he would not lose his children. I believed there was zero chance of that. I cared about my brother and respected him. That one phone call to Social Services was declared to be the worst thing one can do. It was interpreted as a scheme to do who knows what. Growing up there were over one hundred times when I wanted a neighbor, family member, friend, or anyone to call Social Services. It got to the point that it was far worse than any hope that the violence could ever be corrected. I had wanted someone to do what I did. I maybe didn't know that my niece was wanting me to call for her. Carrie said that was not what she wanted. That means it was just my desire on one hundred or more occasions of abuse and assault.

I was assaulted on the face, back, stomach, and legs. I was hit with items, and items were thrown at me. It was unpredictable. I didn't know when to expect it or how to stop it. I knew no one noticed it or reported it. So, to be absolutely sure, that my niece wasn't asking for help, I impulsively acted to do what I thought was required of me to do. It was not to hurt my brother or for him to lose his child. I didn't have the knowledge Carrie had about what Emily really wanted. I just knew what I wanted. I identified with the girl. It seemed that she was asking for help.

If it was wrong, it wasn't the same as the over one hundred times I was assaulted by our parents. Why is it demanded that one forgive one hundred or more instances of abuse, but no one should forgive a single instance of making a mistake in the interpretation of what a little girl is asking you? My parents made me too sensitive, I guess. Too eager to empathize and protect. As an adult, someone once told me that I should use the experience of abuse from growing up to be stronger. Maybe I could have gone into law enforcement. I didn't think I was the right stuff for that job. That's why I respect people in law enforcement and the military.

I had not realized this when I wrote this, but I might need you as my cousin again. I need family. I need someone to say they care about my situation in life. My sister will probably continue to scapegoat me. She will feel a need to protect Mom from what she perceives as further evidence of my meanness toward Mom and my Dad who died. She will wrongly assume I hold a grudge. She will wrongly assume I want to hurt her, Mom and our family or I want to keep hurting them. We drifted apart, and she never tried to get to know me better.

Please consider how we can be a family again. Tell Dan, Tracy, Norman and Barbara that I miss all of you and need you all. You will never know how much I have cared about all of you. If you give me the rest of our lives, I'll show you just how sincere I am. I'll earn the relationship that I could have had a long time ago if things were different. I feel like that will be a miracle. So much time and so much distance has separated us. I haven't always been the best son, brother, cousin, nephew, uncle, or friend. I have tried my best. I just wanted you to know this.

Your cousin,

Bruce