

My Turn: Alaska is ready for Erin's Law

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The cure for Alaska's epidemic of childhood sexual abuse begins with breaking the silence. It's time to give Alaskan kids the tools they need.

When I was a little boy growing up in Anchorage, I knew just what to do if I caught on fire: Stop, drop, and roll. I knew because they taught me in school, just like they later taught me to "Just say no" to drugs. The lesson was mandatory.

What I didn't know is what to do after I was raped when I was 7 years old. I didn't know what to do when the rapist threatened to kill me and my parents if I told anyone.

I didn't know at the time what rape was. I thought it was a freak occurrence, making me a freak. And so I didn't tell. I kept it to myself for 25 years and suffered in silence — the same way thousands upon thousands of Alaskan victims of childhood sexual abuse are suffering now. They are suffering without the tools they need to cope and expose their abusers.

Abuse can be overwhelming; fortunately, the Legislature is close to making real progress in giving Alaskan kids the tools they need to stand up to this abuse. It's time to pass "Erin's Law".

Erin Merryn made a strong impression when she shared her story with legislators last year in Juneau. Erin was sexually abused by a family member as a child. Now a leader in preventing abuse, she is determined to see all 50 states adopt "Erin's Law."

Erin's Law requires school districts to provide age-appropriate curriculum about personal body safety. It also gives teachers, staff and administrators the tools they need to respond properly to allegations of childhood sexual abuse. The Erin's Law catchphrase is: "Get away, tell today."

That message cannot be spread or strengthened enough. To that end, I implore citizens to contact their state representative. Urge them to pass Erin's Law this session.

Nineteen states have passed Erin's Law. Last year, Erin's Law passed in the Alaska Senate but failed to pass in the Alaska House of Representatives. With early bi-partisan support, there's no reason Erin's Law cannot become law this year — abuse is not a freak occurrence.

One in six boys and one in four girls in the U.S. are sexually abused. Nine times out of 10 it's by someone they know.

We teach kids what to do if there is a fire, earthquake or other emergency. We must face the reality that more of these students will be harmed by sexual abuse than by these other threats. Teaching kids about personal body safety is essential to keeping them safe. Let your legislator know that it's time to pass Erin's Law.

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THEATER | THEATER REVIEW

Damaged for Life, and Inexorably Bent on Revenge

‘Stalking the Bogeyman,’ Based on a Real Victim’s Odyssey

NYT Critics’ Pick

By NEIL GENZLINGER OCT. 1, 2014

The seats at New World Stages are comfortable enough as theater seats go, but you’re not comfortable for a second watching a show currently playing there, “Stalking the Bogeyman,” the riveting true story of one man’s search for his rapist.

The play is based on an article that the journalist David Holthouse published in 2004 and later adapted into a story for the radio program “This American Life.” The trip from page and airwaves to the stage has only deepened it, thanks to several especially fine performances in the production, adapted and directed by Markus Potter.

Roderick Hill plays Mr. Holthouse, who does not mince words when describing what happened to him in 1978, when he was 7. His parents (Kate Levy and Murphy Guyer), newly relocated to Anchorage, are befriended by another couple, here called the Crawfords (Roxanne Hart and John Herrera), and it is their son, a tightly wound 17-year-old jock, who attacks him.

It wasn’t “inappropriate touching” or any of the other soft-sounding phrases often associated with this subject, David says: “It was violent, sick, pedophilic rape.”

David reaches adulthood still trying to come to grips with the assault and, eventually, resolves to find his attacker (Erik Heger) and kill him. But the play isn’t just about revenge; it also explores shame. David keeps the rape from his parents for years. When they finally learn the truth, his mother makes a phone call to the Crawfords that, as rendered by Ms. Levy, is chilling and heartbreaking at the same time.

The scene is breathtaking, yet the play isn't done being harrowing: still to come is a climactic encounter in which David confronts his rapist. The focus here is on Mr. Hill, of course, but it is Mr. Heger's transformation that really makes for an indelible few minutes. His teenage version of the character was maybe a little too energetic. When it comes to this pivotal moment, though, the portrait is utterly convincing. "Stalking the Bogeyman" is at New World Stages, 340 West 50th Street, Clinton; 212-239-6200, telecharge.com.

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