

DEAR

GOVERNOR

CUOMO,

For 20 years, I have been viewed through the lens of the law and lens of propriety because it was unbelievable that a man of God would abuse a child.

For just this once Mr. Governor Cuomo,

WILL YOU PLEASE JUST SEE ME?

WILL YOU SEE THE WORLD AS I VIEWED IT AND WHAT THIS WORLD LOOKS LIKE TODAY, TO ME?

I do not seek to justify a death, or to minimize the pain I undoubtedly caused to his family. I do not wish for you to choose sides, but to see the overall picture: to seek choices made in mere seconds, under extreme conditions; to imagine being 16, with limited recourse, lacking the wherewithal to give a voice to my shame, so I accepted silence. As a survivor, I have to justify the irrational, overwhelming need of love, acceptance, and the fear of abandonment. I have to answer questions demanded of me:

WHY WERE YOU LEFT ALONE WITH HIM? WHY DID I LET IT GO SO FAR?

WHY IF IT WAS SO BAD, DID YOU NOT CALL THE COPS, OR TELL A TEACHER, OR TELL YOUR PARENT?

WHY SHOULD WE BELIEVE YOU? WHERE WAS YOUR MOTHER, FATHER, BROTHERS, SISTERS, AT?

As a survivor I have to justify my worst to you. I must illustrate how I've been to therapy and have educated myself by obtaining an Associate Degree and Bachelor's Degree while incarcerated. Yet, it is what I demonstrate that I seek you to see. That I have become an assertive leader, and an intellect who helps others with their school work, an inspiration to others who does not walk away from someone in need of help.

Qualities enhanced because I passively allowed someone to abuse me, not able to truly comprehend my worth, as a daughter, or a sister, at such a young age. As a survivor, I have to justify my life. Upon every introduction, I must lay open bare wounds that have scar tissue and the ones that have never healed. I must expose my guilt in surviving allowing myself to be judged and inspected. Often wondering about the scorecard people have acquired and used to check off the variable that determines if this life has merit.

If my incarceration was warranted to bring peace to his family, I pray that it was achieved. But, if it was for justice, justice cannot and will not ever be served. **There is no day off for being a survivor.** Every day you battle with the victim you were and every day you start out with **"today is the day I will forget"** or **"I will move past this"**. But really you just learn every day to accept who you were, that you weren't smarter, you couldn't run faster, you were a child in the arms of a grown man. His experience alone out-powered you.

Being a criminalized survivor, I must justify hope for myself that freedom is near, that my life can be more than a cell. I hear of countless women who were victimized and abused and now lead successful lives of raising a family, helping others, and a productive member of their community. I would love to believe that one day, that too will be me: the mother, a leader, a pillar of the community. I too will want to be an inspiration to other young girls and women.

MAYBE, ONE DAY SOMEONE WILL SAY I WAS ABLE TO FIND STRENGTH BECAUSE YOU, PATRICE SURVIVED!

Thank you,
Patrice L. Smith

Patrice Smith was only 15 when she met a 70 year old bishop who initiated a sexual relationship with her. Just a year later, when she was 16, she acted in self-defense and protected herself from a violent assault by him. At the age of only 16, after a trial in which she expressed tremendous remorse for his ultimate death, she was convicted and given a maximum sentence of 25 years to life. As is often the case, no one believed her story of coercion and sexual abuse by a man 55 years her senior. Now 36 years old, Patrice has been incarcerated since 1998.

Survived and Punished NY calls for your fearless support of survivors like Patrice who live within the intersection of gender violence and criminalization. To learn how we're working to free Patrice, visit freethemny.com