

Welcome to journey on. I'm D.J. Burr, the host and executive producer. I'm a licensed psychotherapist, behavioral addictions specialist, and best-selling author of, "I Just Wanted Love, Recovery of a Codependent Sex and Love addict," available on Amazon, audible, and iTunes. This podcast is for male survivors of sexual abuse and assault who want to experience a life worth living beyond a tragic past. I'm a survivor just like you and I know the complexity of healing from trauma and I also know the joy that comes from the healing process. Here are our stories and share your own. You are not alone! You two can breathe deep and journey on.

I encourage you to visit the journey on website at www.journeyonpod.com. There you will find a link to sign up for my recovery journey newsletter, learn about my day weekend recovery events for male survivors and my online recovery coaching services for male survivors.

If you have questions, concerns or comments or would like to be on the show, email me at journeyonpodccast@gmail.com. Journey on his own social media. Tweet us @journeyonpod. Find us on Instagram and Facebook at [journeyonpodcast](https://www.facebook.com/journeyonpodcast).

The month of April is national sexual assault awareness month, sponsored by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. This year, the SAAM Campaign is engaging voices. The focus will be on involving coaches, faith leaders and bystanders by preventing sexual assault. Many groups such as salt and he is same problem but they. With this year's post cards, the NSVRC hope to help these voices talk about preventing sexual assault. You can download the toolkits and postcards as well as other support tools at www.nsvrc.org/saam/getinvolved.

Look out for our social media post this month using the hashtag #SAAM and the hashtag #journeyon as we celebrate national sexual assault awareness month. I'll be looking for your posts with the same hashtags as well. You never know I might reach out to you as well and want to hear your story.

D.J. Welcome to another episode of Journey On. Today I am speaking with Joe Braxton. Joe, welcome to the show!

Joe Hello I'm glad to be here.

D.J. Thank you. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule. **Joe**, tell our audience who you are and where are you and then you and I will go into your story,

Joe Okay. Hey guys. I'm Joe Braxton from [the] Maryland, D.C. area. I just wrote a new book entitled "Still Breathing - How to Regain Your Life After Being Robbed." I am also the creator of Lapels for a Cause, enhancing your style with awareness, lapel pins, lapel flowers.

D.J. Awesome! It sounds like you're a busy guy.

Joe I try to be. It helps to keep your mind off of things.

D.J. Right! I'm glad you mention your book. I finished your book and your book is revealing. I mean, Joe, in his book, Joe is talking about his sexual abuse and the things that happened to him and what is life's been like since he came out about the abuse. So, I appreciate anyone who is willing to talk about their struggles and their survival. That is why I invited Joe to talk on today's show.

So, Joe, tell us. Where does your story begin?

Joe [Joe laughs] I guess it would begin... I was... Well... You want to know how it began - the conception of it or how I... When it started, the abuse.

D.J. Yah. Let's talk about when the abuse - when did the abuse start?

Joe Okay. I was 11 years old... 11 years old. It was a very confusing part of this episode of my life. I didn't know if it was good thing or a bad thing or... If it was supposed to happen or... It was just a confusing part of my life when it happened.

D.J. Well that makes sense to me. It would be confusing for an 11-year-old when an adult approaches you for sex.

Joe Yeah. I guess I also felt like I kind of deserved it or I don't know. It was just confusing. So, it was just the beginning of I guess, the effects will have in [my] life started then.

D.J. [Agrees] Was this someone close to you?

Joe Yah. Yes. It was someone very close and which they're still around. I wrote the book not to incriminate anyone. Because they have family and kids and things like that. My heart was with the kids. You know, I didn't want them being teens growing up. Even though I had to release this book to help with my healing, I also wanted to help the abuser or anyone else or any other abuses out there realize what they do or the things they do, how it affects us.

D.J. so, you wanted to get your story out there without necessarily naming him so he wouldn't have to go through a bunch of consequences which might affect his family.

Joe Yah! Because also fear was a another big thing and why I never really told anyone. It's been over 24 years. Even though every day I can't live my life in fear anymore, abusers, they may have a retaliation streak. I think about that every day, but like I said, I can't live my life in fear. I didn't write this book to incriminate anyone. I wrote it so that all of us could get help. I hope they take it is that.

D.J. I'm glad that you wrote it. We need to have more voices talking about our experiences. The book is very impactful. Starting at 11 years old, being sexually abused by, from what I read, what was a friend of the family or someone who is close to the family....

Joe Yes.

D.J. As you said earlier, that's very confusing. I'm curious, when did you disclose this abuse to your family?

Joe Oooh. Well... It kind of never got disclosed! This was like, Still Breathing is like the first time it's ever been exposed.

D.J. Wow!

Joe There's a lot [he pauses to laugh] coming out of this book that is shocking a lot of people. It's also been a therapeutic experience for me because I have been holding in for almost 24 years. I feel like it's time to live. I'm not healed from it... by the book... but it's a step in the healing process.

D.J. Absolutely! You know, healing is a process for sure. Can you give us an idea of the make up your view family? Is your mom and dad still with us? Things like that.

Joe My mom and dad are still here. They've been separated for since I was like four or five years old. When it comes to that, to the abuse, I felt like my abuser gave me a sense of masculinity that I yearn for from my dad. I kind of fell in love with that part of the abuser. I have a really a difference of a situation where it kind of went on since I was 11 until about two years ago, two or three years ago, the way it went on. I said, I fell in love with the abuser - the masculinity part. It was like, it was like, he was just a weird situation.

D.J. in your book, you describe him as a father figure.

Joe Yah.

D.J. it sounds like maybe he went from father figure to more of a lover?

Joe Yah! It was like that.

D.J. How old are you now?

Joe 36. I'll be 37 in May.

D.J. You said that the sexual relationship between you two didn't end until about two years ago?

Joe Two or three years ago. Yes.

D.J. Oh, my God!

Joe Yes! It was. [exasperated sound] It's been a tough situation.

D.J. But I doubt you're the only one who's had that experience.

Joe Okay.

D.J. I truly doubt that you're the only one who's had that experience where it started out where you started out being abused by an adult and because you didn't necessarily have the awareness or skills or tools that you needed, the sexual relationship continued.

Joe Yah. That's kind of what I became... I became like their sexual toy. That's all I was to them.

D.J. I hate to hear that.

How has this sexual assault impacted your relationships with friends and family and maybe even other dating partners that you might have had over the years?

Joe It has affected... It has impacted on many levels. When it comes to friends, I, I hold my friendships with so much loyalty. I have a trust problem as well because of this. If I consider you a friend, I hold you dearly to my heart. I don't know if that comes as a side effect of abuse or sometimes abandonment issues or things like that, but I'm also afraid of that - fear of rejection. I hold my friendships that I have, I hold them dear. When it comes to relationships with lovers? That's always been a hard thing. Even though, when it came to relationships, I didn't feel as though they love me and less there was some type of verbal abuse or physical

abuse or mental abuse from them. If I got that from them, then I felt like they loved me. Those are some of the effects, side effects of it.

D.J. It's like looking for the same thing you always had.

Joe Exactly! I was always looking for that same feeling. No one could ever give me that same feeling that the abuser gave me so I would look for certain people that would resemble the abuser, that made me feel like they were the abuser. When it came to sexual relations, it always had to feel as though it was like a forced... Like a rape experience going on in order for me to enjoy myself. It affects you in many ways. I didn't realize any of this until a few years ago when I decided to write this book. It was like, "Wow! This really impacted my life." I can't find the right words to say. Yah - It has!

D.J. I think a lot of our listeners will understand what you're trying to say. It is a very confusing time for you and it didn't just happen once or twice, we're talking 20 years, right? 20+ years! I can definitely see how you would be impacted and influenced in relationships and how you might be seeking out that familiar. I'm curious, who helped you come to realize may be what you were in was not a healthy dynamic

Joe I also went to school for massage therapy. I think during massage therapy over the years, what I call a bodywork, well... Doing that over the years, I think has kept me sane because it helped balance all the pain that I was feeling and the negative energy that I was harboring all of these years. The energy help balance back. That help me stay sane.

I have a good client who is a pastor who has the gift of discernment. One thing, he talked to me a lot. He was just going over some things and it was just like he was telling me my life. I was just in shock. What he said to me was, "You become the father figure to so many people because you're trying to fill a void. You're so nice to so many people, even though you have so much pain, you're filling the void." He also said, "You don't feel like you're worthy of love. That's why you give it to so many people because you don't feel like you're worthy of it and when something good happens to you, you run away from it. You don't feel like you deserve it. I was [thinking] on it and I was saying that there was someone... Something happened to me."

I was like, "Wow!" During that time, I also fell into my deepest depression. This is like 2014. I fell into my deepest, deepest, darkest depression. I lost everything. I mean, I did want to do anything. I lost my car. I was down to zero. I had gotten on my knees and I said, "Lord! I have to break out of this." I had to come to the realization that what I was going through and why I was feeling this way... And it just clicked. I was like, "Wow!" From being sexually abused as a child and going through it all these years, it has really impacted my life. By him helping me discover this, that's when, "Still Breathing" burst.

D.J. So this pastor, he saw right through you.

Joe Yah. It was a strong experience. Very, very weird.

D.J. So what I'm hearing is empathy and maybe he was able to connect with something that he's had an experience or something he's previously witnessed from someone else and he was able to connect with you which open the door for you, really.

Joe Mmm hmm. [Agreement]

D.J. That sounds like a very moving experience. I hope this person is still in your life.

Joe Yes, there are. Yes

D.J. You said that the pastor and said that you give out love to everyone else because you don't think you deserve it. That resonates with me too. There was a point in my life where I just thought, I'm worthless. That doesn't mean that you have to be. Let me build you up.

In your book you said, "I made myself feel like nothing just to make him feel like everything."

Joe Yes

D.J. That makes sense to me because if you are doing that with him, you are probably doing that with other people.

Joe yes. With everybody. With everyone. No matter what was said about me, no matter what was done to me, I still had a smile on my face. They were treated with kindness and that was all that mattered to me. I had to realize even though I still feel that way... I had to start saying to myself every day, "I am worthy of love. I am worthy of kindness. I am worthy of good things. I'm worthy of God's unconditional love. I'm worthy." I have to enforce that into myself every day.

D.J. Every single day. Yes! Absolutely! That is self-care at its finest. I am a therapist. I work with clients who have been sexually abused or assaulted. One of the hardest things is for them to accept that they are worthy after having had an experience of assault or abuse. It takes time. It takes patience and kindness and compassion for ourselves to build ourselves back up. Once we are, once we love ourselves, no one can take that away from us.

Joe Yes.

D.J. I think some of us miss that experience growing up. We don't get what we need. I often say to people, look. Your parents probably did the best that they could but that doesn't mean that they had all of the things you needed.

I'm curious, did something like that happened for you or was is something missing?

Joe Well yeah. It's kind of like I'm playing catch-up now. I always bring this up. When it comes to... People always used to joke on Michael Jackson when it comes to his eccentricity in reference to children in his childhood. I've always felt like I related to him in some kind of way because I lost out on my childhood. I lost out on my innocence. I lost out on my choices. I didn't have the chance to make my own choices and what I wanted to do sexually, you know? Different things like that. I felt like I... Even as a grown man... I know a grown man. I have responsibilities. But I still feel like that child, that child that just wants to live and have fun and play. I still feel like that. Sometimes.

Sometimes, some people may misunderstand me because they never knew what I had gone through. Now that this book... "I'm Still Breathing" is out, maybe they can get a better understanding of why I may feel this way or act this way or sometimes I may seem to do immature things. It's all in reference to that. I just want to go back to 11 years old, 10 years old and get that happiness back.

D.J. Right. When trauma happens, our emotions become stunted. Just over the last few years, you're starting to come into your own and probably experience all of the emotions that you did not when the abuse was going on. So, that makes sense to me that you're still having these

experiences of immaturity. You are growing up. You're becoming a young man emotionally. I can tell you as someone who has been through this that you'll become the right age emotionally. It does happen eventually. It just takes time.

I'm curious what have been some of the consequences of some of this heinous act in your life? Have drugs, alcohol been a part of your life?

Joe Well, yes! Oooh. I... Alcohol. Alcohol... [Nervous, reminiscent laughing] Alcohol has been that go to pain reliever over so many years. I recently just cut back on drinking so much. That was my pain reliever for so many years. Music has been my pain reliever. But the effects of it in my life - I was running away from it for so many years, following wrong crowds, looking for love in so many wrong places... Trying to do things just to forget the abuser, to get away from the abuser. There's, I feel like I could be so much further in life if I did not feel unworthy so much. Because of this, I have to, it's like I'm almost rebuilding at 36 years old, where I should have been a few years ago. Now I'm playing catch-up. I know things happen for a reason. I'm also thankful that I'm still here, I'm surviving and I'm able to share my stories to help others get through their situations. They can get to them as well.

It's still tough. I'm not to say it's not tough. It's been tough!

D.J. one of those things in your life that are helping you get through, now? I heard music and music can be a lifesaver for sure. Are there other positive things that you're doing now?

Joe I'm trying to build a strong relationship with my mom. Because of this, because what happened to me, I was always embarrassed by it. I always stayed to myself no matter who it was. I built up this huge wall. I'm trying to be a more outgoing, open person. I'm starting to talk more now. I have to get my vocabulary back up because I've always been a mu for so many years so it's like I have to get back and talk again.

I get support from my mom. I get support from so many people now. It's like, I try to look for the good in days now, instead of always dwelling on the past, or the negative things. If a negative thought or depression starts coming to me, I hurry up and jump up and try to better my spirits. I know that I have to keep fighting.

Like I said, I have good support now. Also, therapy! Therapy helps. Therapy, good support, believing in yourself, loving yourself, loving myself, believing that God loves me unconditionally no matter what I've gone through matter what I've done. He loves me unconditionally.

D.J. I really could hear that in your book. You talk a lot about your relationship with God. Was that something that, were you exposed to religion or spirituality and God in your family of origin? Or is this something that you've discovered since the abuse?

Joe well, no. I've always been, even since I was little I would go to Sunday school and Bible study and things like that. I am not a heavily religious person. I believe in the most high, I believe in the high spirit. I believe there's a God. But I'm not a heavily religious person. I believe that there's a God. Without God, I don't know how I could survive. I thank God for everything he's done.

D.J. Amazing!

Your book came out recently, a couple of months ago?

Joe Yes, February.

D.J. Okay - in February. I've seen in social media the you been doing interviews, talks with other folks, and I'm wondering what has that experience been like while you're in it?

Joe well, it's been, it's been therapeutic. It's also give me, each time it's give me a platform to tell my story, to get across to so many people, males, females who have may be gone through something like this. Whether it's sexual abuse or anything that's [keeping them from] joy, to know that they can get through it. They have to want to get through it, they have to keep fighting for it.

To do these interviews now, I don't know if it was the shyness or the feeling unworthy, now that I'm speaking more about it, I'm feeling more comfortable releasing my story. It's still fresh. Is still brand-new. I've never told anyone. The more and more that I talk about it, it seems like it's erasing any fear that I had.

You have to remember, fear was always the number one point in not telling anyone because I was told that if I ever told anyone, they would find me on the side of the milk carton box. I kinda believe that. I still live to this day because the abuser is kind of crazy. But like I said, I can't live my life in fear. As long as him helping other people, that's what I care about now.

D.J. I'm definitely hearing that you don't want to live in fear but I'm curious if you ever considered any legal avenues to protect yourself.

Joe I think about that all the time. I think about that all the time. I'm just not sure how that would work out. By being so long, the limits, [statue of limits] I'm not sure how that would work out. It's been over 24 years.

I don't know. It's a weird situation. A lot of people say, **Joe**, well... Why are you protecting them? I say, well I'm not protecting them, I'm protecting their kids. That's the confusing part to me. Like I said, right or wrong, I know that they've made my life a living hell, you know for a lot of years. Why should I protect them? Did he care about mine? But it's like, as a child, and I know how today's society is... I know I was a child wants. I know how cruel growing up in bullying can be. I don't want them to go through that. So that's what I think about all the time. Even though that crosses my mind, I'm just confused about that part.

D.J. you know, when I came to realize that I was abused, I had the same mindset, that I needed to protect the family. I did protect my family. I stayed quiet for like 17 years. Then I started talking about it. And I started telling my family about it. I started talking to my therapist about it. I remember him saying that my obligation was not to protect other people is to protect me. For me, that means revealing my truth. That's what got me on the path to speaking about my abuse because the more I kept it in, the more I was hurting myself.

I'm not sure if you knew this about me, but in October, I reported my abuser. Yeah, the statute of limitations, that's a thing. It exists. It's different in every state. But you know they straight up told me that there's nothing they could do. But for me what was important was that his name was in their system in case another child ever had the experience that I had.

That was so important to me. I truly believe that I sleep better at night now.

Joe Also, with that story, someone called me and said, you know **Joe**? What you call report, or do something? Because, you don't know how many others are out there, how many others he's

done this to. They were like, **Joe**, F that man because he didn't give a S about you. So, why do you care about them?

You know, after so many years, just like I said, I was literally in love, this is the love of my life. You know what I mean? I mean after 24 years, now, I'm finally breaking away from it, from this long-term abusive relationship. It's kind of hard because it plays wit... There are so many levels of emotions here. It's kind of hard. You know, I almost want him to be punished, but I also want them to get help, to understand why they did this.

D.J. [Interjecting] Maybe he will. Maybe other people will come forward and you'll hear about that the news or something.

Then you can add another voice or something. But you have to decide today.

Joe Mmmhmm. [Acknowledging]

Also, before the book came out, they caught me out the blue. This is the time when I was so stressed. Like, "Wow... They get to see this book and know it's about them." I was so afraid and stressed out, like what am I gonna say? You say this to them. They called out the blue, and was asking, "is there anything in this book I need to know about?" He caught me off guard. I was shocked. I did know to say. So, I just played it. I was like, "what you mean? Why are you asking?" Then he said again, "is there anything in this book that I need to know about?" I said, "Well, I'm not sure." I wanted to stop playing with this. I said, "well, yes. It's my story. It's what you did to me." They were acting shocked, like in denial. I was going to something religious. I was having a religious experience. I never stopped them.

So, it was like, "Wow! Yes... This is the reason why I tell my story because they don't see nothing wrong with what they've done.

There was a relief of them knowing that the stories coming out. Also let them know that is not going to incriminate because of their kids. I want to protect the kids. That was the main reason - their kids. It still bothers me every day. I think about it every day.

D.J. have you forgiven him **Joe**?

Joe [Clears throat.] No. I haven't.

D.J. That's all right, too.

Joe I haven't. I mean, it's hard because if you read the book, there's so many levels, so many things that have gone through in life because of this. Sometimes, I feel as though he really ruined my life in kind of a way.

They might not ever understand this, but they've ruined my life. I feel like now it's like I'm playing catch-up. Try to make things right. I'm trying to better myself. I'm trying to... I'm my own publicist now.

That's the part I can't forgive, like, he ruined my life. If, if, if I didn't have certain support, if I didn't have strong-willed determination to keep going, I would've been dead by now. So, I don't know how I could ever forgive them.

D.J. But you know what, the important thing to remember and hold true to yourself is that you are strong, you are a survivor. It doesn't matter that you haven't reported him or revealed his name, because you're the survivor. What happened to you should never have happened. Because it happened, you now are given a voice to a problem that exists in our culture and throughout the country, throughout the world where people, men and women, believe that they have the right to abuse a child. They don't. Because of your voice, because of my voice and everyone else who steps forward and speaks about their experience, we are letting other survivors know that they are not alone.

Joe [agrees]

D.J. I can tell you, my first-hand experiences that, that is healing. I've healed so much just by doing this podcast and I've only been doing it for a few months. I healed when I published my book, "I Just Wanted Love." I heal every day that I get to show up at my office and witness other people coming to terms with their abuse and making a decision to change their lives and not to allow the abuse to stop them from living. **Joe's book go get Joe's book**

Joe Wow. What you just said, just like really touched me. It brought tears. "I Just Wanted Love."

D.J. [agrees]

Joe [continues...] That's, Wow! That's deep. I can relate to that.

D.J. that's what I'm hearing from you. You are working on loving yourself, every single day. And that's what you need. Surrounding yourself with people who are going to love you, who are you gonna treat you kind[ly], are going to be compassionate with you. You deserve better just like the rest of us. My hope is that you find that. My hope is that as you continue to grow and become aware of your emotions and what your needs and what your wants are, you can open up yourself and your heart again to another person who won't be your abuser, who won't need to harm you for you to feel a connection from them. I think if you continue to tell your story, all of those things can happen for you.

I truly believe that. I really want to thank you for giving us the opportunity to get to know you.

Joe thank you for all that you do for all the survivors and yourself. Thanks for being strong for so many.

D.J. it's my pleasure. It really is.

I wanted to end with something I read in your book that was really just uplifting.

You said," I love myself in spite of who people think I am. I need to love myself in spite of who people think I am. I have learned that it doesn't matter who shows up in your life, you must find the strength to always be there for yourself. As long as God wakes me up every day, I am accounted for, I am living for myself."

That is a message to live with, every single day.

Joe, thank you for taking the time to share your story with us. I want our audience to be able to read about you, to follow you on social media and such. Can you give us a rundown on how we might find you?

Joe on Instagram for "Still Breathing", it's @stillbreathingbook. On Twitter, it's @SBbookjbraxton. Lapels for a Cause, you can go on Instagram - it's lapels4acause and on Twitter is the same thing, @lapels4acause. You can go to lapels4acause.com or if you want to order the book, "Still Breathing," you can search on Amazon. It's on paperback and Kindle. You can search, "Still Breathing." You can search, "Joe Braxton." You can order, if you want a signed copy, you can order on my website at www.theJoebraxton.com.

D.J. Awesome, **Joe**. Thank you! Thank you so much.

And, listeners, go get **Joe's** book. It's a great book. I can't put it down. I think I read in a day. It's really amazing. I think you'll get a lot from it.

Joe - thank you for being willing to tell your story and to keep loving yourself, and spite of all the things that have happened.

Joe Thank you! I appreciate you having me on your podcast. Thank you.

Journey On is looking to hear from you. If you're interested in sharing your experience, strength and hope, email us at journeyonpodcast@gmail.com for details.

Journey On's production is currently funded in whole by me as part of my desire to provide support for those who are still suffering. Production costs fluctuate and can be prohibitive in terms of what I can offer our audience. You can help support Journey On's mission by supporting the production. There are two options. You can donate the amount of your choice directly from your cell phone by texting the word journey to 855-735-2437, that's Journey to 855-735-2437 or you can become a patron of the show by setting up a monthly contribution by going to patreon.com/journeyon - that's patreon.com/journeyon. Once there, you can select a contribution level of your choice. Thank you for considering.

Don't forget to visit journeyonpod.com and sign up for my recovery journey newsletter. Once you have subscribed, you will get more information about my weekend mail survivor retreats and my online coaching services for male survivors.

Journey On is produced by D.J. Burr and Recovery Legacy Network, bringing you recovery on all fronts. Learn more at www.recoverylegacynetwork.com.

Today's music features tracks by CDK and Airtone. You can learn more about the tracks from our website add.journeyonpod.com.

Until next time, breath deep [inhales] [exhales] and Journey On.