

A Reading on Elevations RTC FKA Island View in UT
By Joan Bohlman, Guest Sermonizer for May 11th, 2022 (and beyond)

Part 1

I was 15 years old in 2005 when I attempted suicide. After several days in a coma and a week in the state inpatient treatment facility; I was sent to Island View RTC, now know as Elevations RTC, in Syracuse, Utah. I was there for 13 months and a day. Red flags immediately popped up on the first day during the first "group therapy" session. It was not therapy. It was an attack session, that would happen on a daily basis.

Immediately, I was accused by both fellow "residents" and the unqualified staff member of having attempted suicide for attention in addition to lying and exaggerating. I learnt early on that the only thing that mattered was saying only what others wanted to hear. There was no healing at this place, and yet that matters the least of what happened at Island View. The passage of time has caused the specific memories of the daily abuses to fade into static. Maybe it was the overmedication. Maybe it's a trauma coping mechanism. Most likely, it's a combination of them all. It's difficult to recall the small things that occurred over the course 13 months of psychological torture that occurred 15 years ago. The ones I do remember stick out like a sore throbbing thumb in my mind.

In late December 2005, I was caught passing a note to different team member during class. The punishment was called 'Individual Reflection'. All of my belongings were confiscated by being thrown into a trash bag. I was given sweatpants, a sweatshirt, a water bottle, a pencil, and a piece of paper. I was not to speak or even make eye contact with anyone including staff.

If I needed anything, including using restroom or refilling my water bottle, I was to write a note requesting permission and leave it on the ground. Eventually a staff member would come by to approve or deny it. I spent at least 13 days at that desk. I spent Christmas and New Year's at that desk. The staff on New Year's were kind enough to give me a candy bar. At the time, I had come out as gay. I was targeted by the predominantly religious staff, especially the team lead, Steve Pope. I was labeled a predator and accused of grooming whenever I made any close friends. This targeting took many forms but mainly with punishments for "sexually acting out". I made a dirty joke in the cafeteria. My punishment was what they called "Yellow Zone" for 72 hours. Yellow Zone involved sitting in a plastic chair in the hallway from waking up till bed time, then sleeping in the hallway on a mat. Yellow Zone sentences lasted about 24 to 72 hours. I was no stranger to that plastic chair. A panel of peers decided if you were to be let out of restrictions after the time spent in the chair. My only option for survival was to go back into the closet. I came back out 8 years later as a bisexual woman. The journey to realizing my gender identity was significantly delayed due to Island View. The issues with shame and embarrassment plague me still. They had a wide variety of punishments; banally named consequences. From communication restrictions (not being allowed to talk), having to eat sandwiches instead of cafeteria food, Indian sprints, loss of my one free hour, and sometimes loss of my only phone call to my parents. Sometimes there were group

punishments. Physical force was used when you refused to do something. I saw kids get violently thrown to the ground from the top bunk when they refused to get out of bed. The threat of excessive physical violence lived comfortably alongside the ever-present physiological abuse.

There was an intentional culture of fear and snitching. You were expected to meet a quota of tattles every week. You were punished for noncompliance. Same with the attack groups, if you didn't participate then you weren't going along with the program. During some therapy groups, embarrassment and shaming where the goal. Sometimes, it was easier to make things up in order to participate successfully. Therapists recklessly disregarded of HIPAA and privacy guidelines. Your issues were laid bare in publicly, open to scrutiny to others and your parents.

As an adult, the level of negligence they had for children is truly disturbing. Words cannot express the amount of trauma caused with their "treatment". They were highly manipulative and gaslit their minor patients. All communications with parents where monitored and immediately cut off if you said or implied anything negative about the place. The therapists would gaslight parents into thinking that children were purposely subversive. Convincing parents that their children are sick and dangerous is effective to keep earning profits. To this day, I'm not sure my parents comprehend the scale or severity of what happened to me. I'm not only angry for what happened to me but for what happened to them. I was 'magically cured' once my parents could afford to keep paying for me to be there. Some kids graduated after 4 or 5 months, another had been there 2 years. No matter what, it was obvious that it didn't actually have to do with mental health or progress through the so called program. The amount of money they make by praying on parents love for their children is obscene. Everyone involved should be ashamed and embarrassed to have participated in such a vile industry. They should also face justice, remorse is not recompense enough to make up for what they did to children. The relationships of children and their parents/families is another victim of the industry. During formative years, being cut off from your family while enduring mistreatment and abuse, all while they convince your parents that you are the one at fault leads to abandonment issues, guilt, shame, and trust issues. These, like the PTSD all of us survivors have never really heal. There are scars that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Part 2

I got an email about Island View possibly being taken off a watch list. I was there for 13 months and a day in 2006. I am not quite sure exactly what is needed or if my reports from that period have any weight. I've included a pdf of my Breaking Code Silence story in case you need it.

There is a special place in hell for the adults who participated in the program back then. In my 30's, it completely shocks my that they functioned in the way they did. Under no circumstance should they ever be allowed off of any list that functions to hold that place accountable. I still to this day have nightmares that I somehow ended up back there with

no way to escape and would gladly go to prison rather than be there. At least prisoners have rights.

The buildings are the same buildings that I suffered in. The same building kids were abused and mistreated in. Last year, I took my wife to see the place that she had heard a lot about. After being on the public sidewalk for 10 minutes, a staff member came out to tell us to leave from a public place we were allowed to be. I recognised the exact mannerisms that were used to intimidate me when I was a child. When I told him the time period I had been there in, I could see his demeanour changed immediately. It wasn't fear for physical safety (he was a big dude and my wife and I are two queer women), but I could tell he had the fear that he knew that I knew. He was very quick to exit once I asserted my right to be on a public sidewalk and started asking some questions.

I never was able to file any reports. It is a place that ran on emotional violence and gaslighting. I was 16, so I would have only been 24 when 7 years would have passed. All they have to do is break you so hard that you won't figure out your trauma until after the time where you have no options for recourse.

I know for a fact that many other children who were there would have filed reports or lawsuits if there wasn't such a short statute of limitations. How can anyone expect a traumatised and terrorised person with a gaslit family to figure out that they have options to confront their abusers? To even a 25 year old, the idea of getting a lawyer and pursuing these places doesn't even compute. If there are lacks of reports, it's because the place has honed their skills at all of this. It's a symptom of a different online ecosystem.

It only gets more horrifying the older I become. Each year that passes, the more shocking and angering it becomes. The older I get, the more perspective I have. And they got away with it in my case. They got away with it. They, and the rest of the industry, are protected by Utah. It's disgusting.

The fact that Elevations is still the same organisation is enough to make sure they never ever get to escape their past. I believe in my heart of hearts that what happens inside those walls today is harmful. Removing them from any watch list or considering them "reformed" would be a slap in the face of the many hundreds of people who experienced that place. They deserve no merciful release. Mercy is reserved for those who repent and atone. They deserve to be held accountable in every way possible.

People want to leave their pasts in the past when dealing with trauma. As I've healed, the easier it is to see an email come through and forget to respond. Wounds heal but scars remain. I started off this message thinking I just had a sentence or two to speak. But reflecting on those scars renews my desire to fight.

I keep coming back to the idea that it's referred to it being called "merciful release". They deserve no such thing. I hope that some of the people involved will seek forgiveness with their god(s), but I do know they'd have to understand their transgressions before they can receive absolution.

Maybe continuing to have them on the list might have some of them see one day that it's not just a troubled child that is upset with them. Maybe some of them will see that a well adjusted and successful adult still believes that they are guilty of actual crimes. If even one person can have the realisation that they still have something to seek forgiveness for, then it's worth it. But abusers don't believe they did anything wrong. I refuse to stand by allow them to get away with having that peace of mind because I just couldn't be bothered.

Don't look away. Keep them on the watch list. Please

[END OF SERMON]

Commentary by Rev. Angela Smith:

The HEAL Mission has received 64 separate complaints from individuals and families unrelated to each other alleging fraud, undue influence, abuse, and more at Elevations RTC FKA Island View RTC and as described above by guest sermonizer Joan Bohlman. The most recent complaint the church and/or mission received regarding Elevations RTC FKA Island View RTC occurred in 2013. The mission and church are thankful to Joan Bohlman for participating and contributing in-kind and beyond. Bohlman was notified that the following two questions should be addressed in guest sermons about programs on the watch-list:

1. Did you report fraud or other unlawful actions to the proper authorities? If not, why? If so, what happened with the reports? (So, 2 part question)
2. Why do you believe The Elevations RTC FKA Island View RTC should be denied merciful release from the COPE Conversion Program?

I do feel Bohlman effectively answered both questions. I would also like to quote the FAQs (#16 at <https://www.cope.church/faqs.htm>) to end my commentary here, and I paraphrase: "Very small children have both reported crimes and testified in court against their rapists, abusers, and about crimes they witnessed such as the murder of their parent by the other parent. The youngest child in the citations, which are acting as cited sources for the statement(s), to report and/or testify against their abuser was 3 years old. So, if a 3 year old can find the strength and courage to report and testify about abuse they suffered against their abuser in trial court, I feel a competent adult should have the same resolve as the 3 year old and that statutes of limitation are more reasonable than not in full context."

Sources: <https://t.co/BUDwl49lCH?amp=1>, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/carroll/news/crime/cc-new-windsor-rape-trial-day-2-jay-eline-20200304-47wjwqakrvgpzdubg2kjsysl7y-story.html>, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/three-year-old-becomes-youngest-trial-witness-6261012.html>, <https://www.bnd.com/news/local/crime/article233620937.html> , and https://www.mlive.com/news/saginaw/2013/11/prosecutor_michael_lawrences_s.html

Due process matters.

For those reading this who need to report false advertising, misleading marketing, or scams of any sort (including diploma mills), you can report to your home state's attorney general by filing a consumer complaint or file a complaint with the FTC. You can find reporting resources at <https://www.heal-online.org/report.htm> and <https://www.heal-online.org/islandview.htm> . It is my hope that all find this helpful.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.

For More About COPE and the HEAL Mission, see:

<https://www.cope.church> and <https://www.heal-online.org>