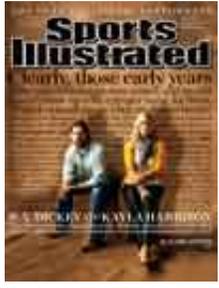


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Stand Up Speak Out

IMAGINE, A CENTURY FROM NOW, LOOKING BACK ON THE PLAGUE OF SEXUAL ABUSE. TWO BRIGHT SPOTS IN THIS DARK HISTORY WILL BE CY YOUNG WINNER R.A. DICKEY AND JUDO GOLD MEDALIST KAYLA HARRISON, WHO REFUSED TO BE SILENT VICTIMS

Gary Smith

Sports Illustrated Inspiring PERFORMERS 2012

Clearly, those early years of the new millennium were a mess, and we still haven't come up with a proper name for them. What do you call an age when an abscess bursts?

Sitting in this classroom as we enter the 22nd century, nearly a hundred years later, it's difficult to believe that such an epidemic could occur, devouring boys and girls simply because they couldn't open their lips to utter its name. Until finally ... well, many experts point to 2012 as the year in which the disease began to loosen its grip.

How could it possibly ravage that many—one in four girls and one in six boys—with some experts convinced that the true number for all children was one in three? I could offer you a half-dozen fallacies that fed the disease, but I'll give you just one: *otherness*.

You see, the first *other* that people pointed to was the Catholic Church, roughly 4,000 of its priests having infected tens of thousands of children over the previous half century, leading many to believe that the disease was largely limited to *them*. Then came news of outbreaks raging through an organization dedicated to building character in young males, the Boy Scouts—an unsettling development that still allowed tens of millions, whose children had never taken the Scout's Oath, to feel safe. It was only when people realized that the sickness had spread to the temples where *everyone* worshipped—to the gymnasiums and stadiums of sports—that the reckoning began, and the air in which the disease thrived started to change.

Of course, it had been festering quietly in athletics long before that, scores of towns having been jolted by cases of coaches who turned out to be carriers. But '12 was the year when a former assistant football coach at a renowned university was imprisoned for life for molesting children; when his boss, a legendary head coach, died soon after being dethroned for not following through on the evidence; when the locker room victims emerged; when former athletes gathered the courage to confront USA Swimming and USA Gymnastics coaches for preying upon them when they were young ... and when the National League Cy Young Award winner, along with one of that year's Olympic stars—the first American to win a gold medal in judo—declared that they were victims as well.

In fact, R.A. Dickey and Kayla Harrison are the pioneers we'll look at in today's class, two athletes who stepped out of the shadows that helped breed the secret disease and showed us how to reach its other side.

Kayla was 14 when she tried to bargain with the doctor. "*Please?*" she begged. "Can't you just put a cast on the thumb and do the surgery *after* the Junior Worlds?"

"I could," the hand specialist replied, "but you won't have a thumb left. The bones in it are completely shattered."

This doctor just didn't get it. Kayla Harrison had once won two matches with a shredded shoulder joint, bone shards slicing into it from both sides. She had barreled right through four concussions, two broken shoulder blades, a broken right foot and even that broken left collarbone and left arm at age 13 when her coach and predator—who was 16 years older than she, 114 pounds heavier and angry at her that day—got carried away sparring and landed atop her in a bone-snapping heap. In no time she was back to setting her alarm for 5 a.m. for three-mile runs and

stomach crunches in the dark, back to passing out from wearing a wet suit beneath her judo *gi* in order to cut weight.

But then, so few in that era understood the warning signs. So few peered carefully enough into the lives of elite young athletes with extraordinary thresholds for work and pain. They were the warriors whom coaches lauded and everyone admired. *People have no idea how toxic an Olympic dream can be*, the girl would say a few years later, when she grew old enough to understand. *I'd use judo as my escape from what was happening to me ... and to punish myself. I'd push myself to the brink of danger.*

Kayla's mother, Jeannie Yazell, was once a middle-distance and cross-country runner. She suffered howling pain in her feet for years and kept running—running and howling all the way to the Ohio state meet four straight years and then to a track scholarship at Ohio State. Not long before college a surgeon opened her feet and saw nearly 20 stress fractures, many of the bones pounded into fusion. At 18 she was a retired runner at a community college, in casts and in tears. In an eye blink she was a hospice nurse with a brown belt in judo, teaching a giggling tyke with bouncing blonde ringlets how to land safely on her squeaking bed when she was thrown, never dreaming what was about to throw her.

Lapdog, R.A.'s high school baseball coach called him. That's how close R.A. kept to the man, niggling at him with questions about the nuances of the game. Lapdog, the last boy on the ball field as darkness fell in spring. The last silhouette on the gridiron in autumn, hurling footballs at the goalpost after everyone at Montgomery Bell Academy in Nashville had gone home. The last shadow on the outdoor basketball court in winter, pelted by midnight snow, shooting game-winning jump shots until he couldn't raise his arms. Couldn't raise his hand to tell someone, anyone, why.

Sports, he would say years later, when he had learned to make words dance like his pitches, *was a way to punish yourself and feel great about yourself at the same time, an amazing libation that kept calling for more. It was an escape—but a counterfeit escape. And so it was an obstacle to health.*

Consciousness, to be candid, was at a lower tide then. Paradox was still too tricky a terrain for the human brain to navigate: It never occurred to many adults that one extreme—excessive repetition of an activity that increased one's control and strength—is often used to mask its opposite, dangerous vulnerability.

R.A., of course, had tried other ways to counteract the poison inside him. He'd gone numb, not caring about himself to the point of peeing in his green chinos in sixth grade rather than walk downstairs to the bathroom, then jamming a wad of paper towel into his crotch to soak up the evidence. He'd tried flailing the toxin out, sending it straight into the jaws of stunned schoolmates in seventh grade. But nobody slapped you on the back for wetting your pants or cheered for your coldcocking a classmate. Sports, because it was the universal obsession then, was hands down the infected youth's wiliest strategy: It offered worthiness in heaps that seemed almost vast enough to fill a child's abyss.

Kayla was nine when the grooming began. She craved attention, and her new judo coach began giving her piggyback rides at family picnics and barbecues, making her feel that she, among all his young judokas, was the chosen one. Then he began reaching beneath the blanket on the couch and holding her hand during team sleepovers, shushing her to make sure the others, in their sleeping bags, didn't stir. Then pretending he had fallen asleep in front of the TV, waiting till her mother and stepfather had gone to bed, slipping beside her on the love seat to massage her back and murmur, "Don't tell anyone ... it's a secret..." He was large and loud, striking fear in her as well as pride, and she couldn't figure out a way to turn down the same adult that she needed to please.

Yes, I said *sleepovers*. No, they didn't set off sirens back then. Coaches were the tribal elders of that era, the leaders that the culture relied on to cultivate their children's character and to conduct their rites of passage. Coaches—just like priests—were in charge of the ladder that people thought *had* to be ascended, but few made the connection, understood the risks that were inherent when people needed such heights and handed over such power. When the boom economy of the 1990s arrived and traveling to compete in sports became commonplace for children as young as 10, the opportunities for coaches to leverage that power only grew.

We wouldn't hand the keys to our car to someone we didn't know well, but we'll do that with our kids just because he's a coach. That's what Jimmy Pedro, the U.S. Olympic judo coach, noticed back then.

The thing is, Kayla's mom *thought* she knew Daniel Doyle, the sensei at Renshuden Club, not far from their home in Middletown, Ohio. He was charismatic, cracked up everyone with his goofy jokes and voices, and coached alongside his pop, a big-bellied native of Ireland with a cane

and a lovely leftover lilt. Daniel groomed Mom in a way too. He rode in the Yazells' car to competitions in distant cities. He vacationed with the family because judo tournaments doubled as holidays. He babysat Jeannie's three children—the other two born after she remarried when Kayla was two—sometimes gave Kayla a lift to practice and even built a retaining wall and a pool in the family's backyard. Sure, it bothered Jeannie when he snapped at practice, kicked Kayla in the back of the legs and spoke to her as if she were a dog ... but he did that to other kids, and besides, wasn't that what coaches did? It unnerved Jeannie when he began carping at Kayla about her diet, her clothing, her hair, her friends, but by now people were talking about her as a future Olympian, and maybe those two things entwined—his obsessiveness and her perfectionism—were the high wire to the podium that had to be walked.

He'd want 20 push-ups, she'd give him 30 and toss in a half-dozen handstand push-ups. *I always thought I had to earn love*, Kayla would say. So coachable, people would marvel. Such a pleaser, just like R.A., so eager to make her mother and coach happy. So determined not to let anyone down: the fertile soil that was so often mistaken for the perfect garden.

She'd freeze when her coach sent his hands under her clothing. Freeze ... and exit her body, burrow into some far-removed memory, travel further and further away until it all became a nightmare occurring to somebody else. She couldn't fathom what would happen to her or to the golden journey, the one for which her mom and stepdad were sacrificing so much, if she uttered a word. Yes, here was the strange twist that no one grasped at the time: The athletes with the biggest futures could be the easiest prey, blackmailed by their own dreams.

At 13 she won the triple crown, all three junior national tournaments, and began climbing age and weight divisions to take apart grown women. She was a relentless attacker, a hellcat on the mat. Trailing in the last seconds of the final at the junior Pan Ams, she scored a dramatic *ippon*, the judo equivalent of throwing a knockout punch just before the final bell. She was only a seventh-grader, but she *had* to start competing abroad to become an Olympian, Daniel persuaded her mom. Estonia? Venezuela? Russia? The Yazells simply couldn't afford it; the dream was costing 20, 30, 40 grand a year. Oh, yes, they could; their kid had a gift. Jeannie maxed out the family credit cards, took out a second mortgage, bought the plane tickets, paid for the overseas hotels for her daughter and coach.

No more team around. No more witnesses. Open season.

Sweet: That's the word everyone used to describe R.A. as a little boy. Always in your lap, a little fountain of questions and affection. But he just wanted to watch cartoons that summer evening when his mother ushered him into the condo of one of her friends, whose daughter would be his babysitter. He hadn't a clue what the 13-year-old girl had in mind when she took his hand and led him upstairs. He was eight years old.

His mom was still in the living room, having one for the road with her friend. She was an alcoholic, scraping to get by since her husband had packed up when R.A. was seven. The bartender fed quarters to the boy on weekend nights to keep him busy playing video games while she closed down her neighborhood bar in Nashville. He could hear his mother now through a bedroom vent, the clinking glasses and the laughter. Hear her as the babysitter, in a voice hard and dead, ordered him to take off his clothes and hers, as she shoved the stuffed animals off her four-poster bed, as the sweat of pure terror poured from his skin, as she pressed down on top of him. She ordered him into an adjacent room when she was done. He lay there feeling like wadded trash, trembling. Tell someone? He had no idea what had just happened, only that it had to be wicked, and now he must be wicked too.

It happened four or five more times that summer, as if he kept closing his eyes and lapsing into the same twisted dream, kept waking drenched in the same shame, clenched in the same fear of speaking it. And then....

What strange undertow had taken hold of him that summer of 1983? He was visiting relatives a few hours from Nashville that September. Coincidence, sick coincidence, that's all he could surmise years later. He was tossing a ball off the roof of a rundown garage not far from the relatives' house when a tall, wiry boy, perhaps 17 years old, approached. Maybe they could play roof toss together, R.A. was thinking, when suddenly he sensed the teenager glancing around to see if anyone was nearby, then the unbuckling of belt, the unzipping of pants. He turned to run, felt the boy seizing him, pinning him, overwhelming him. Then heard him rise and run away.

Let's stay here for a moment. We've got two children who've just taken a dagger. They don't yank out the dagger. Someone might see it. Besides, if they leave it there, maybe nobody can put another one in. And so scar tissue begins to form around it. They don't realize it, but the dagger soon becomes part of who they are. They end up protecting it, in a way, rather than pulling it out to look at it and learn about it. They end

up dedicating their lives to hiding it—strategizing, lying, manipulating others to make sure their eyes go somewhere else: to the strong, smart, confident, golden children they both seem to be. *Fabricating who I thought I should be*, R.A. would say later, *and trying to live up to that*.

Kayla covered a bedroom wall with her goals and inspirational quotes. Kayla flirted with boys to throw everyone off the trail of her and her coach. Kayla became the dumb blonde when an opponent—a woman twice her age who'd picked up the scent as she watched the 15-year-old and her coach during tournaments—asked, "So ... what's up with you and Daniel?"

R.A. became the pious public Christian, attending teen fellowship meetings, studying Scripture, reciting prayers, turning on his heel when the guys started joking or bragging about sex. He let no one get close enough to spot the dagger. He became Tennessee's high school baseball player of the year.

All of that kept R.A.'s and Kayla's families and friends from ever going *there*. But it left one thing to seal off. Their own minds. Any moment left unfilled by practices, workouts and school, any pause could become the ember that sparked the forest fire. Fantasy was their extinguisher, stories of two heroic youths coming of age and triumphing in distant worlds that were pulsing with danger and evil. Kayla hurled herself into a series of books of that era about a boy with magical powers: Harry Potter in the car on the way to practice, Harry Potter on the couch at home, Harry Potter on her bed till 1 a.m. She read all seven books at least five times, some of them nine or 10 times, and watched all the movies 10 to 20 times. What is it? What's the number at which a parent's pride in a child's dedication and imagination must turn to that first whisper of worry? *I used magic to make everything go away*, Kayla would realize later. *I wanted to live in Harry Potter's world and be a wizard or a witch*.

R.A. lost himself in Luke Skywalker and a series of movies known as *Star Wars*, watching the first three movies 30 or 40 times each, devouring five- or 10-minute bites when that's all the time he could spare, memorizing scenes and dialogue so that when it was just him and his mind, no video nearby, and the first floating ember of the old fire appeared, presto, he could tap *rewind* again and again. Abruptly he'd be Luke trapped in a trash compactor inside the enemy's Death Star, the walls closing like jaws—precisely how R.A.'s life felt—screaming through his com link to a robot companion named C-3PO, "Shut down all the garbage mashers on the Detention Level, will ya? Do you copy? Shut down all the garbage mashers on the Detention Level!" Or Luke being taught by an old warrior named Obi-Wan Kenobi how a Jedi uses his mind and his light saber to conquer evil: "Trust the Force, Luke.... Remember, a Jedi can feel the Force flowing through him."

I pulverized it, R.A. would understand later. *The minute the thought crept in—gone! I made it so it never happened*. Magic.

Harry's powers began to weaken when Kayla was 15. He kept waving his wand and uttering his banishing charm—*Depulso!*—but her horror reappeared in front of her every day at practice, recurred when her coach got her alone. Her magic had to be more cunning than R.A.'s. She had to believe that in a few years, maybe when she turned 18, she and her coach would get married. She had to convince herself that they were in love.

For a while that worked. But now her eyes had begun to adjust to reality's tricky light. This *couldn't* be: a life with a verbally abusive man twice her age who built her up as the world's next great judoka one minute and tore her to shreds the next? But this *had* to be. She needed him like air, was sure she couldn't win without him. It had to be, for the rest of her life, or she was guilty of something dreadful ... or she was exactly what a future Olympian, a world-class martial artist, could never be: a victim.

She realized she was trapped. It was too much shame and rage for a kid to lock inside; she had to off-load it somewhere: *Mom*. She screamed when her mother questioned or refused Daniel's demands. She locked herself in her room and tore everything off her walls when her mother threatened to keep her home from judo practice as punishment. She called the cops when her stepfather had to hold her down to restrain her. She moved into her grandparents' house. She moved back to her mom's. Hormones? Adolescence? That's all Jeannie could figure had happened to the bubbly little pleaser she used to know. I HATE MY LIFE! I HATE MY MOTHER! Kayla scrawled across the pages of her journal. She quit high school and began taking online courses so she could train longer and harder. Her friends vanished. She began to think of ways to kill herself.

The Force began to ebb when R.A. was 17, and all the deadness inside him began to drive him out to the fringe of the human pack. Six years earlier he had shoved some clothes into a bag, walked right past his sobbing mother and gone to live at his father's house not far away. But he felt even less connection there, so now on Friday nights, when he couldn't bring himself to ask his high school friends if he could stay at their

homes again, he began to sleep in the back of his car. And then to study the classified ads in the newspaper, circling the addresses of houses for rent, finding them and casing them for cobwebs to confirm that no one had been there for a while, and searching beneath welcome mats and flowerpots and rocks till he found a key.

He felt alive when he took a risk. For a few hours, in some place other than a ball field, he could steal back what the two predators had stolen from him: the present moment. He'd park a few blocks from an empty house, slip inside with his sleeping bag and pillow and settle in on the floor, never turning on the lights, knowing that the sun and his fear would awaken him at dawn so he could exit in secret.

Headlights flashed in the driveway one night. He froze, fumbled for his belongings, began scrambling toward the back door. What would become of his eligibility, his impending scholarship to Tennessee, his whole career if the state's high school player of the year were arrested for breaking and entering?

The headlights receded. Just someone turning around. He crawled back into his sleeping bag and lay there till his heart stopped banging. Feeling stronger somehow, more in charge of his gnawing aloneness. A lapdog that had snapped the leash and proved he could cut it as a wolf.

Here's the difference between then and now: Parents reading about R.A. and Kayla in that era would have begun creating a mental checklist by now, without even being aware of it, of all the ways that those two kids were raised differently from their own kids, reassuring themselves that *this* wouldn't happen in their families. *Othering* them. Not understanding, back then, that something unseen could demolish every self-protective wall a human could build, every *they* he uttered, every *them*. Not understanding energy.

Not grasping the enormous energy field that everyone was living in, the one created as sports became religion, a field charged with power and vulnerability, crackling with magnetic pull to both perpetrator and victim, offering a delivery system to the first and a hiding place to the second.

Not grasping the vast field of guilt about sex that had been passed on for generations, a shadow energy more compelling than any obligatory talk children received about speaking up if someone touched their "private parts," gripping them in the silence that sex offenders thrived on.

Not understanding an even more complicated energy that could get trapped in the pit of men and women who were violated as children, that could compel them to go back and replay the insult from its other side, to become the perpetrators.

Let's sit for a moment and notice our own energy right now. Notice how, when our surprise at what *wasn't* known then begins to settle, we start to feel the deep pain and sadness that all those children and parents must have felt. We didn't understand.

The cracking point came after Kayla turned 16. At the senior national tournament in Miami, 45 seconds into her first match, she began to weep. She had argued with Daniel and he had stayed home, but now her mind was so tangled that she didn't know if she could do this without him. She hung on and won, her mother helping her off the mat and begging to know what was wrong.

"Daniel's done things to me," she sobbed.

"*What?*" demanded her mother.

She hedged. "He ... he touched my chest..."

Then she clamped up, finished second in the tournament and insisted on driving home to Ohio with Aaron Handy, a teammate seven years older who'd become her best friend, her rock. Her mother, full of dread, flew home.

Aaron smelled fire. On the ride he hammered away, asking Kayla to tell him exactly what their coach had done to her. She trembled. She knew that she was on the verge of doing something extreme—ending either her life or her lifelong dream, quitting judo forever—but what she couldn't do in that moment was tell one more lie. Not to the one person on earth she trusted.

She hung her head. "We've been having sex," she murmured. "For a few years."

His hand shot up and shattered the windshield. He pulled the car off the interstate.

"You're calling your mom," he said.

"No, I'm not. And you *can't* tell anyone else."

"You're telling your mother now! We're not going anywhere until you tell her."

They sat. Finally she lifted her phone and called her mother, got her voice mail—Jeannie was still in the air—and forced out the words.

Jeannie landed in Ohio, listened to the message, called Kayla and began asking questions that she couldn't imagine ever forming in her mouth ... then stood there, thunderstruck at how far it all had gone.

Jeannie took the bat she used on a travel softball team. She went to Daniel's, smashed all the windows of his car and truck, then smashed a half-dozen more on his house.

Her daughter finished the drive home in shock. At least the worst was over, Kayla thought.

The course of the disease was curious. It could slither through the body and brain and then coil, like a python, around the will to live: The long-term impact of sex abuse in childhood was the leading cause of attempted suicide among females of that era. Or it could burrow and congeal, as R.A.'s did, a time-release capsule secreting a toxin too subtle for anyone, even the carrier, to trace.

Who could have guessed—after a Texas Rangers trainer saw a group photo of Team USA's starting pitchers just before the 1996 Olympics and noticed that R.A.'s arm hung at a different angle from those of his teammates, leading to tests that revealed that the team's recent No. 1 draft pick had no ulnar collateral ligament and caused the club to reduce its \$810,000 offer to a mere \$75,000—that for years every reference to that missing ligament would go straight to R.A.'s core wound: *You see? There's something wrong with you. You don't belong here.* And that every media reference to his having been picked off the scrap heap, as he bounced from team to team and languished in the minor leagues for most of 13 seasons, would bring back that old wadded-trash feeling he'd had when the babysitter and the teenage boy were done with him. And that every ragged pitching performance would confirm his deepest fear: *You deserve this. You're damaged. They know it. You know it.* Then, when he could bear it no more, whiplash, turning upon the very God for whom he'd created a Christian charity that took sports equipment and the Gospel across Latin America: *Dammit, I work harder and longer than everyone else. What do you want from me? Am I not doing everything I can, God? What do you want?*

His body would be standing on the mound in front of thousands, peering in for the sign, but his mind would be curled up and cringing, repeating psalms with runners on second and third to con God into conjuring a pop out, bracing for the next blow because each blow was landing on the old dagger, driving it deeper. He'd rip off his glove and cleats after getting the hook, sometimes hurling them into the trash, slipping away to sit in the dark of a movie theater, teeth grinding on popcorn.

He refused to give up on the game when he found himself reporting to Triple A Oklahoma City for the fifth, sixth, *seventh* time, when he packed up and moved 31 times in 10 years. He needed what baseball was meting out to him, the punishment and the rootlessness and the skin-deep camaraderie, the garage apartments and the cheap motel rooms, the blow-up mattresses and the cardboard-box coffee tables, the drifting and the distance.

His guilt grew each February when he left behind his wife, Anne, a former valedictorian at Tennessee, to raise their two daughters so that he could try and fail again while her career choices dwindled. He shrank further and further away from her as their marriage wore on, the wounded wolf resorting more and more to the survival skills that had always worked best: camouflage and motion. Using his affability and gift for words to lighten the mood, to appear in charge, to change the subject whenever it began creeping too near to his feelings, his sadness, his secret. Living the way he pitched, afraid of contact.

Nearly a decade into their marriage, sitting in another clubhouse getting ready for another game, he got a call from her. She was hysterical. Come home right now, she cried, or it's over. She'd found out. The reef he'd been living on had grown too lonely. The co-founder of Honoring the Father Ministries had strayed.

He lost his home that autumn of 2006. He lost his life with his wife and three young children. He slept on a couch in their old house in Nashville—the one they'd moved their furniture out of but hadn't yet been able to sell—while Anne decided what she would do next. No, he didn't sleep. He lay there breathing in the stench of his aloneness, listening to the echoes of everything gone. A hose attached to a muffler would do the job if

he could trust himself to sit still that long. A country road and a tree and an unbuckled seat belt would, if not.

There was no seat belt for Kayla on that never-ending truck ride through the night. No real seat, either. She was squeezed into a fold-up lawn chair jammed between two bucket seats in the cabin of a U-Haul truck, waking up just to cry again, crying till she slept again, hurtling 800 miles from Ohio to the outskirts of Boston because her mother couldn't risk a motel or a rest stop, couldn't peel her eyes off her 16-year-old daughter even when they stopped for gas or to pee. Kayla might make a break for it. "What are you doing?" Jeannie cried when Aaron, who was heading east with them, pulled off the road to take a catnap. "Keep driving!"

For a month she'd watched all the circuits shut down in her daughter: no school, no judo, no reason to rise from her bed or the couch. Then Jeannie, desperate, rolled the dice. People might have thought she was nuts to drive 14 hours and deposit a depressed child with strangers—the coach of the U.S. Olympic judo team and his father—at a dojo atop Bruno's Plumbing and Stewy's motorcycle shop behind a cement factory in Wakefield, Mass. But Daniel was free on bail, and Jeannie was convinced that she had to get Kayla far from his clutches, convinced that fighting again and dreaming again was the only way Kayla would ever *live* again, convinced that her daughter's only way out was *through*.

The Pedros, Big Jim and Jimmy, were surprised by Jeannie's request but agreed to try. The universe smiled: Blaise Aguirre—the medical director at a psychiatric ward for teenage girls exhibiting self-endangering behavior—was a black belt who trained in the Pedros' dojo, and he fast-tracked Kayla into nearby McLean Hospital in Belmont with a diagnosis of severe posttraumatic stress disorder. She freaked when she realized what was happening, sobbed and screamed as her mother bit her lip and left her in the ward. She'd go back to judo, Kayla pleaded, she'd do *anything*, just don't leave her there.

She got permission, a week later, to do intensive therapy all day and leave for a few hours at night to train. But she was a wreck in the dojo, a puddle of tears. Judo felt dirty now, and everyone, she was sure, was staring and whispering about her. Every time she stepped on the mat, Daniel rematerialized—*What are you doing, girl? You know you can't do this without me!*—leaving her both loathing him and thinking she loved him, and trembling over everyone's expectation that she would testify against him and lock him away.

She and Aaron moved into the eight-bedroom house that her new coach, Jimmy Pedro, rented out to his team of elite judokas. She felt as if she were going crazy: the Pedros shouting at her each night at the dojo to suck it up and go to war, to "kill for the love of killin', Kid!", the psychologist the next morning urging her to open her heart, let down her guard and release all her feelings. Why was she waking up at 5 a.m. to pump iron for an hour and a half, working 50 hours a week at a hardware store loading 80-pound sacks of sand into pickup trucks, taking online high school courses, running off to therapy sessions that ripped open her wound, starving herself to cut weight and getting the crap kicked out of her for two hours on the mat every night when she just wanted to run away, be a nobody, serve lattes in a coffee shop ... or....

Panic seized her chest and closed around her windpipe. Anything could trigger it: the smell of Daniel's cologne on a stranger, hotel rooms that looked like ones they'd shared, a song they used to listen to, a screaming coach. One night she jumped in her car to escape before something terrible happened, afraid even to stop for gas because the people at the station would know her secret, then drove south on the interstate to start a new life and finally pulled over, even more scared of what she'd do without judo. Another night, in a blizzard, a panic attack sent her crawling out her window onto the garage roof and leaping down to the yard to evade her worried teammates downstairs, then scrambling through the neighborhood and into a nearby nature reserve.

Aaron, terrified that she'd taken an overdose of sleeping pills, bashed down her locked bedroom door, then he and seven teammates jumped into three cars to pursue her, a police car joining the hunt. Spotting her finally as she emerged from the nature reserve and headed toward an adjacent school, they took off after her on foot, slipping and spilling on the ice. A teammate named Bobby Lee yanked off his shoes, bolted after her and tackled her on the track. She lay there sobbing and heaving in the snow.

Education, of course, was how we finally contained the disease. Once the dust from the revelations of the early 2000s settled, once people stared at the numbers and *realized*, the momentum began to shift.

Realized that one in 10 men had molested a child, their likelihood of being caught only 3%, according to FBI statistics cited by the Center for Behavioral Intervention in Beaverton, Ore.

That, in three studies of those convicted, the number of molestations committed by the average pedophile ranged from 88 to 264.

That 25% to 30% of convicted sex offenders, in a conservative estimate, were arrested again for the crime after their release.

That the odds were that in a family of five sitting down to dinner, one of the five had been or would be sexually abused ... and most of the abusers were immediate family members or very close to the family, which meant that the victims often loved and protected the perpetrator.

That most repeat molesters worked in an environment surrounded by children and befriended the parents first before gaining the child's trust.

That more than 70% of parents who sexually abused children were abused as kids.

That, in an age rife with divorce, children living with a single parent or with a parent and an unmarried partner were at more than five times the risk of violation as children living with married biological parents.

Yes, once we realized just how *pedestrian* pedophilia was, we couldn't afford our ignorance anymore.

Pain was what those legions of victims needed. Pain saved R.A.'s life. Only when it grew intolerable, when all the strategies that kept him from feeling it gave way beneath its weight, when Anne was thinking of changing the locks and his pastor was tapping on his door every morning at 6 a.m. to make sure he was committed to living another day ... only then was he ready to begin relinquishing the dagger.

Sort of. He took an elevator to the third floor of a run-down office building next to a Nashville beauty salon, took a seat in front of a therapist named Stephen James and tried to see if he could get by with pulling the blade out just a little bit. But Stephen kept calling his bluff, brushing off his contrived replies—"I don't want your *SportsCenter* answer, R.A."—and steering him back to the laminated page lying between them with the seven root emotions.

"I feel frustrated that—" R.A. would say, and Stephen would say, no, sorry, until R.A. reviewed the list and started over: "O.K., I feel *sad* that" or "I feel *ashamed* that" or "I feel *afraid* that," a man finally turning toward his pain and fear and exploring what lay beneath them.

The *beneath* was even more agony, leaving him feeling so raw and scarred that one day, while he was watching for the umpteenth time a scene from the *Star Wars* series in which Luke has a vision of fighting his mortal foe, Darth Vader, and seeing his own face under Vader's mask, it suddenly struck R.A. in the gut: He wasn't Luke, the boy hero he'd identified with all his life. He was Darth, the scarred creature whose armor had hidden and separated him from the world.

One morning, sweat-soaked and crying, R.A. finally yanked out half the dagger, revealing to Stephen only what the babysitter had done, and all the guilt and shame spooled around it. What stunning relief it was when Stephen sat there and nodded, absorbing it all. But R.A. still had miles to go, and it was nearly time to drift away again, to go play ball. The universe smiled: The only organization that offered him a minor league contract in 2007, the Brewers, had its Triple A team right in Nashville, allowing him to remain in the deep, deep water with his new guide.

But what had to happen in therapy was exactly what had to happen with the new pitch he'd begun to work on, his last-gasp chance to salvage his career, his knuckleball: He had to stop flinching, he had to cut loose and release it with the commitment and frequency that it would take to reap its rewards. But there he was in June with the same sorry numbers next to his name, standing in a glass-walled hotel elevator overlooking the Missouri River just before a series in Omaha, a 32-year-old man in the last days of what *had* to be his last season ... when he got this brilliant idea.

It was vintage R.A.: Do something risky to make himself feel alive, do something athletic to divert all eyes from the damaged man dying on the mound, do something he'd toyed with before but that everyone who lived on the Missouri told him was lunacy: swim across it.

He stripped to his boxers and scaled a fence with the eyes of his disbelieving teammates glued on him, then plunged in and began windmilling through the turgid waters of North America's longest river. Not halfway across, he knew he was in trouble. The current had already swept him a quarter mile downriver, an undertow was sucking him under, his muscles were locking with exhaustion. Keep going—or turn back? He turned back. The undertow sucked him down again. Panic flushed through him. He wasn't going to make it. He began to weep underwater and pray to God to protect his family when he was gone.

He sank, hit bottom, pushed off and kept thrashing, *one more stroke, one more stroke*. He caught a blurry glimpse of a teammate, reliever Grant Balfour, who'd grasped the danger and followed him down the river, scrambled onto a thin platform protruding from the shore and stretched out

on it, extending his hand and shouting to him. Somehow R.A. gasped his way there, flung out his hand, found Grant's and was hauled in. He collapsed on the shore and lay there, heaving. He'd finally reached it. The far limit of R.A. Dickey. The very end of himself.

He noticed something odd that evening, strolling across the outfield grass during batting practice. Joy surged through his body. The old smoke was gone from his head.

Nine young judokas saved Kayla Harrison. Nine young judokas, in a houseful of testosterone and estrogen and identity crises, with nicknames like Babaganoush and Boon and Ground Round and Handyman and Big Ron—Big Ron was a girl—who literally lifted Kayla out of bed in the morning, helped her with her schoolwork, poured her into her *gi*, mingled their sweat and blood with her tears on the mat, and even squeezed smiles from her when they gathered at night to mock the "reality" television shows that were popular in that era about 10 young people in a houseful of testosterone and estrogen and identity crises.

Nine judokas, known as Team Force, and two coaches urging Kayla to funnel her rage at what had happened, to focus it and vent it on the mat, to exhaust it. Jimmy Pedro, the most decorated U.S. judo fighter in history, the two-time bronze medalist who'd become the Olympic coach: the good cop. Big Jim, his dad, a black belt, former meatpacker and firefighter: the bad cop. The one screaming at her, "Just train and stop your goddam crying!" because, after all, "that's what got me through two divorces. Releases your problems. Gives your brain a rest." The one who would vow to her, when she froze up on the eve of tournaments because she knew that the whole judo world *knew*, "stick by me, Kid. If anyone there says anything to you, they'll think a flock of wild cats landed on 'em."

The bad cop finally got through to her when she won the U.S. Open in 2007 and felt absolutely nothing and told him she was quitting for good. He invited her to his house, this silver-haired man with the curt air of an old European farmer bent over his grapes in search of fungus, and he sat with her in his backyard watching the steam rise from a lake at dawn. "You know, kid," he said, "what happened, happened. It was a terrible thing, but some day you have to get over it. It doesn't have to define you. You have a chance to do something great with your life, but I can't want it for you. Terrible things happen to people every day, but they've got to get back up."

No magic happened. She wasn't healed. She needed to quit dropping out of therapy and stay with it long enough to dig deeper and see wider. She needed to keep going through the motions long enough to begin harvesting all the fruit that sports dangles alongside its thorns, the sense of purpose and belonging, the team dinners and encouragement and teasing and pranks. But the deep truth of Big Jim's words finally sank into her: Yes, sex abuse had occurred to her, but sex abuse *wasn't* her. And for crissakes, Kid, stop feeling guilty and put that coach in the slammer before he does it to someone else!

She wavered, but finally, on a winter day in 2008, she walked into a federal courtroom in Dayton to confront her former coach. The moment it became clear that she *would* testify, he had pleaded guilty and plea-bargained, so now her task was to make a statement at the hearing that would determine his prison sentence. She cried hysterically in the hallway outside the courtroom, called her new coach and listened as Jimmy told her to take deep breaths, approach this moment as if it were a judo match and look at no one except the judge. She entered the room, swallowed hard and tried to make strangers understand what sex abuse had done to her life. "What had once been my passion," she said, "became my prison."

The judge opted for the longest sentence permitted under the plea-bargain agreement, 10 years. When Daniel turned to Kayla as he was led from the courtroom in handcuffs and said, "I love you," she collapsed.

Collapse was critical in the crossing of the soul's dark night. Without it, R.A. came to realize, surrender couldn't occur. Without it, the shrine of self couldn't be dismantled and the river of grace could never flow.

But wasn't it enough, all the surrendering he was doing on the couch of his therapist and of his empty house? No. He was a male, a male *athlete*, and so his surrender had to occur in the physical realm as well: He had needed the Missouri River.

The pitcher who entered that river was 3--4 and had just been demoted to the bullpen. The pitcher who exited it reclaimed his starting job, went 10--2 and won the Pacific Coast League's Pitcher of the Year award. The pitcher who exited was one who threw his knuckleball 80% to 85% of the time instead of 60%, even if it was hit 445 feet, who trusted it, who could finally feel the skin of his right thumb on the leather of one side of the ball and the inner part of his ring finger on its other side, could finally feel the correct pressure of his finger pads and the seam grazing his

thumb as the knuckleball left his hand ... could finally *feel* it and repeat it, because he was finally *there*, all there, not swimming in his thoughts. Could finally submit to baseball's ultimate act of surrender, the release of a pitch at jayvee velocity with no rotation or will imposed upon it, a pitch that might suddenly move in any direction because it moves on the impulse of air movement, on the universe's whim.

Once he surrendered fully, once he told Stephen the harder story of the second rape and found himself crying harder and longer than he had in his life, once he sweated and heart-pounded and choked and told Anne, once he trusted God enough to vent all his rage at Him without doubling over with guilt ... one more heartbreaking task remained. He had to go back, Stephen said, and retrieve what he'd disowned in himself, what he'd left behind.

He tried to do it by visiting his mother, with whom he'd grown close after her recovery from alcoholism, and staring at photos of himself as a child in her scrapbook. Then he tried to make that connection by writing. But he couldn't penetrate the wall of that summer of 1983, and so one morning in the autumn of 2008 he entered the Abbey of Gethsemani—the Trappist monastery in New Haven, Ky., where the renowned author and monk Thomas Merton once lived—for what once, before R.A. had learned to shift his attention to his breath and disbelieve his thoughts, would have been murderous: three days of silence.

He spent hours in his small, bare cinder-block room and amid the shadows in the old stone church, praying, waiting. He sat at his desk with pen in hand—still nothing came. Finally he took a long walk across the hills, listened to his feet crumble the dying leaves ... and found him, sitting on the ground, his shoulders slumped, facing the other way: the lost boy. The innocent child. The victim.

R.A. sat next to him and wept. "Don't worry," he finally told the boy. "It's going to be all right."

The boy would have none of it. "How do you know?" he demanded.

He didn't want to be fixed, R.A. realized. He just wanted an arm around him. For the next day and a half, they walked together. Sometimes the man would say, "I'm so sorry I wasn't there to protect you."

"It's O.K.," the child replied. "I forgive you."

Sometimes the child would say, "I should've run away. I should've kicked and screamed. I should've told someone. Why didn't I?"

"You didn't know any better," the man said. "You were too afraid. You were too ashamed. Don't beat yourself up. It's O.K."

Then he'd put his arm around him again, and they'd walk on through the rolling meadows in silence, letting the world be what it is, sad and beautiful.

No one will ever know how many flashbacks were triggered by the graying man in the red prison jumpsuit. No one will ever know how many private doors were battered open by the yearlong siege of headlines and news stories about the boys Jerry Sandusky violated in locker rooms and on football road trips, and about the university officials who chose to protect image and money rather than children.

But when Penn State students took to the streets to vent their rage that their beloved head coach, Joe Paterno, had been fired for not doing enough, when some smashed windows and overturned a news van, and when a friend of Kayla's on Facebook asked, "Why is JoePa blamed?" ... the last wall of fear broke in her. Rage roared through her, blew away the last layer of fog from her brainwashed child's mind, demanded action. Some *other* coach abusing some *other* child, and the subsequent apathy to the wreckage that wrought, allowed her to finally see just how deeply she had been wronged and how warped was humanity's response to the disease.

A national newspaper reporter, by chance, had just arrived to do a feature story on her. Kayla suddenly found herself telling the whole world what she'd never dreamed she'd tell a soul, and then again and again as the 2012 Olympics drew near. It took a savage toll; she felt like the 16-year-old girl in the psychiatric ward after each telling. But at 22 she discovered just what R.A.—as he sat in a room and wrote one stabbing sentence after another for the book that would bare his horror—had found: the astonishing energy that's liberated when a human being lets go of the lid she's been holding on top of a volcano. The force that swept Kayla right past a torn left-knee ligament five months before the Summer Games, right past four opponents in five hours in London to win the gold medal and to suddenly realize, as the national anthem soared and her tears streamed and her guard dropped further still, that the 13-year-old damaged child was standing beside her on that podium. The force that swept a 37-year-old scrap-heap knuckleballer to his 20th win that same summer on a day when Mets fans in New York City chanted his name,

waved giant R's and A's and loved him in a way that people love a child or a monk or a dying man who has shed all his armor and come before them in his truth.

The telling of their torment, both found, robbed it of its randomness, infused it with a purpose that pulled fellow victims to them in droves, wandering ghosts turning to them for the courage to speak the name of the disease that had disembodied them. They stood in line for hours at R.A.'s book signings, handed him letters detailing agonies they'd never whispered, leaned close and murmured that because of him they were going home that very night to tell their spouses why they'd always been just out of reach. They wrote to him from prisons they found themselves in because they'd done what had been done to them, and even a fellow ballplayer approached him for help because he too had been infected. They called and texted Kayla at night, astonished that a gold medalist would give them her phone number and tell them to contact her anytime they felt lost.

She went back into therapy after the Olympics because even a gold medal isn't big or shiny enough to pierce every shadow, and she didn't want old issues to mar the life she envisioned with Aaron, the man who'd become her fiancé. She, too, began working on a book, one that would help parents recognize the warning signs in their children. Another former Olympian, Katherine Starr—who had been molested for years by her swimming coach when she competed for Great Britain—founded Safe4Athletes to help sexually abused athletes get counseling and legal help, and to persuade sports organizations to screen coaches far more closely.

R.A. climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and helped raise \$100,000 to fund Bombay Teen Challenge, a program designed partly to rescue and rehabilitate girls sold into sexual slavery in India, and would take his two daughters there to learn more about it. He made sure that all four of his children—two sons had joined his and Anne's brood—felt free to speak about sex organs and sexuality because he knew that was the foundation that had to be laid first.

And gradually, as heroes such as R.A. and Kayla began coming forward, the multitudes who had been molested began losing their fear of being ostracized, and the healing began that broke the vicious cycle, drastically whittling the number of victims who would turn into perpetrators. Primers on the subject became commonplace, and training programs for children and parents, such as the one that's brought us together here today, became as ordinary as Lamaze classes for pregnant women.

Fear, it turned out, was essential to altering the energy field around the disease: It had to be recalibrated and redistributed. Administrators had to become more afraid of the consequences for their careers and organizations if they *didn't* take swift action against pedophilia than if they did. Parents—who either tiptoed around the topic or referred to it with such loathing and rage that their children became scared to speak up when lines were crossed—had to become less afraid. Fear, paradoxically, was what kept us from drawing clear, healthy boundaries, what made us keep calling the molesters *monsters*, never understanding that each time we did that, we frightened the victims into deeper guilt and silence, left them feeling they'd consorted with a monster.

My heart broke for those boys in the Penn State scandal because I knew what they would be up against, R.A. would say. And then ... I felt for Jerry Sandusky and what happened to him in his life. The toxicity of it all is so frightening. It energized me, made me see that there's a real need for activism. The taboo's been breached. Finally the elephant in the room is out—it's raising its trunk and bellowing.

And so we'll close today's class with a moment of silence. In compassion for all the young people involved in sports who were trampled. In gratitude to sports for making us own the elephant.

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