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# I Survived Intrafamilial Sexual Abuse. Here's Why Shows Like The Family Secret Matter

Survivors like Kath and me did nothing wrong. The culture of lies, secrecy and shame that lets child sexual abuse go unchallenged must be confronted, writes Chris Tuck.

 By Chris Tuck



COURTESY OF CHANNEL 4

Like Kath (pictured as a child), featured in Channel 4's *The Family Secret*, the author is a survivor of child sexual abuse

It was empowering to watch Kath, a survivor of child sexual abuse, be heard, believed and validated on Channel 4's *The Family Secret*. From the opening credits of Tuesday's programme, Kath was in control of her own story, and in control of her quest for restorative justice.

In the show, Kath told her story of being sexually abused by her brother Rob from the ages of seven to 11. She's not alone – most child sexual abuse happens within the family, the old maxim that “an Englishman's home is his castle” meaning perpetrators can act with impunity behind closed doors.

I should know. Just like Kath, I too was sexually abused at home by a family member.







When I first spoke out to teachers and social workers I wasn't believed. I was effectively silenced for years. When Kath first suggested that Rob, also a child, had abused her, her mother simply didn't want to believe it. Like me, Kath was silenced, and a wall went up. She didn't want to break her mother's heart and she kept his secret to keep her family together. Children do lie, and they cover things up – just not in the way society tells you they do. I often feel frustrated that children are forced into this situation, and seeing that Kath had also been forced to cover things up made me feel less alone.

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**Facing the abuse is daunting. There is no social script dictating how a family will respond when the abuse comes out.**

Often it is easier for society to ignore abuse. Kath seemed to have a perfect family and after the abuse began life continued as normal for her brother. For Kath, a parallel world had opened up where her home wasn't safe anymore. There were signs – Robert on the landing by Kath's room, Kath crying in her bedroom – that with more education and understanding her parents could perhaps have spotted.

Facing the abuse is daunting. There is no social script dictating how a family will respond when the abuse comes out. In her thirties Kath disclosed the abuse and was believed and supported by her mum and another brother, but her parents' relationship broke down. Her mother no longer trusts her own judgment. My family has also been torn apart by the abuse. It's good to see the abuse finally confronted. However, I empathised with Kath, and seeing the pain her family went through made me wish coming forward was easier.

The show reminds us that even when survivors do speak out, often they aren't taken seriously. During the restorative justice process, Robert continually minimises, and tries to erase, his abusive past.

In the documentary, Robert describes his abuse as “intimate”, and suggests it “only” went on for two-and-a-half years. Kath calls this out as rape, and says it went on for four years. She asks why he felt entitled to do what he did. Robert describes the excitement. To him, his sister was simply “a means to an end”. Hearing this took me right back to my childhood, where I felt worthless and degraded.

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**There's a culture of lies, secrecy and shame that allows child sexual abuse to go unchallenged. We must confront it**

Not everyone can get access to criminal or restorative justice. By the time some survivors are ready to come forward, their perpetrators may have died, or there may simply not be enough evidence to bring a case. I'm currently pursuing criminal injuries compensation and a criminal case.

That's why the [Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#) has been calling for an open, frank conversation about child sexual abuse. As portrayed in *The Family Secret*, there's a culture of lies, secrecy and shame that allows child sexual abuse to go unchallenged. We must confront it.

The Inquiry established the [Truth Project](#) to provide a supportive and non-judgmental space where survivors can be heard and share their experience. So far, over 4,000 survivors – each with their stories like Kath and like me – have come forward to their experiences, which will in turn be used to help keep children safe in future. All survivors who come forward to the Truth Project are asked to put forward recommendations for change.

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**If we keep talking, it will be harder for the abuse we have survived to be kept a secret**

The Family Secret shows why it's so important to keep talking. If a subject remains taboo, it will only ever be seen in the public consciousness as something shameful. Kath and I should not feel shame at having been sexually abused as children. We did nothing wrong.

If we keep talking, it will be harder for the abuse we have survived to be kept a secret, and vulnerable young people will be able to speak out safe in the knowledge they will be recognised, and they will see justice.

*Chris Tuck is a survivor of child sexual abuse and a member of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse's Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel.*

*[The Family Secret](#) airs Tuesday at 9pm on Channel 4, and is available on All 4*