

BREAKING THE SILENCE FILM CHRONICLES RISE OF INNERMOTION, A FORT LAUDERDALE DANCE COMPANY WHOSE MEMBERS ARE VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE.: [Broward Metro Edition]

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Sharon Daugherty remembers being 6 years old and finding her father in her bed.

"He was trying to explain the birds and bees and men and women... and did I want to touch his penis," Daugherty recalls in *Innermotion: The Dance of Incest*, a documentary about a volunteer dance company based in Fort Lauderdale whose performers are adult survivors of incest.

The 72-minute documentary, produced and directed by Miami-based Sylvie Rokab, will be shown Saturday at the Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival.

For Daugherty, the sexual abuse continued for 15 years. And it remained a terrible secret, even when stress sent her to the emergency room, and even when she confronted her unsympathetic mother.

Years later, an angry and empowered Daugherty broke the silence and started *Innermotion* by putting an ad in the paper, looking for other survivors of sexual abuse. A decade later, the nonprofit organization has a core of volunteers whose performances mix dance, skits, humor and therapy on stage. Each ends with an invitation to "survivors" in the audience to join them.

The *Dance of Incest* tells the story of *Innermotion*. The first few minutes are re-enactments of the abuse as the performers describe being raped, beaten or molested by an alcoholic father, a doting stepfather, an angry uncle, a teenage boy.

"It is disturbing," says Rokab, who was told at another show that the first three minutes are too difficult to watch. "It's about children being sexually molested by their parents. I can't imagine people watching this and not being disturbed. The intention for those who have not gone through it was to say, 'This something painful but let's look at it.' For those who have gone through it, we're validating their experience."

Rokab says she was moved by the courage of *Innermotion's* members in speaking publicly. The subject is so "taboo and controversial," she found few willing to fund the low-budget documentary. They were able to raise less than \$30,000. But Rokab had been hired to shoot footage on a nonprofit agency for Stanford University, and was able to dovetail the two projects.

"The ultimate message is to tell people this happened and it's horrible. But these are examples of people who have gone through this and really come out the other side. They have chosen the healing path. It's also a way to say, this violence is happening to children and we need to pay attention. It might be happening across the street, next door or in our home."

According to Marilyn Volker, a South Florida sex therapist interviewed in the film, one in every three to four girls and one in every six to eight boys is sexually abused by someone they know. Yet most children, through intimidation or shame, remain silent.

"I do remember feeling very dirty and ashamed, very frightened," says Robyn Peterson, an *Innermotion* dancer who was 7 when she was first assaulted by a teenage boy, a family friend. "I remember wanting my hair to grow, wanting to hide behind my hair. I felt as if I was a dirty spot."

As a teenager, Peterson turned to drugs and alcohol. She was "a tough kid," angry and violent, bullying her classmates. But no one asked her why, or considered the possibility of abuse.

"Tell them?" she says of her feelings then. "I really didn't even know how."

That's a message she hopes to send to teachers, counselors and families whose children are troubled or acting out: At least look for the signs.

"Children still don't feel safe enough to say anything," Peterson says. Relatives, neighbors, teachers, guidance counselors still turn a blind eye. "Maybe they don't want the stigma and shame. But someone, something needs to be in place that

would say, 'Hey, this is going on and we need to look at it.'"

While Peterson and others describe teenage drug use, alcohol, even bulimia, Daugherty covered her secret by becoming "too good, too pleasing," she says. In high school, she made straight A's, became a class leader and won the title of Miss Lauderhill. She hoped that if she did everything right, maybe the abuse would stop.

As an adult, she sought therapy, then a master's degree in mental- health counseling and finally punishment for her father. In 1992, when she was 34, Daugherty had her father arrested on charges of capital sexual battery.

The charges were soon dropped because Daugherty did not remember whether she was 9 or 10 when she was raped. Sexual battery on a child younger than 10 was a capital crime and not subject to the statute of limitations. That law now applies to children younger than 12.

Now 45, she is the single mother of a 7-year-old girl. And she remains the creative and driving force behind Innermotion.

"Our goal is to break through the silence, the secrecy and expose this problem," she says. "It's an all-out war to end the perpetration of sexual violence against children. We want to make people remember and stay awake."

Today, 13 years after Innermotion started, there are six main performers and 25 core volunteers. It is funded by private and public grants; only Daugherty draws a salary.

"No one had done this before," Daugherty says of the group. "We had to pave the way. We were bringing people together and saying, 'We're going to have incest survivors dance onstage.' Then we were saying, 'Only incest survivors can come to the first performance.'"

"The first night, we had no idea who was going to come or what was going to happen. Eighty people came through the door. The next day, other people were allowed to come and we had 250 people."

"My first thought was, how dare they dance about incest," recalls Peterson, who attended an early show. "It was such a private thing. How could you bring it out in the open?"

She quickly changed her mind.

"We know that our audience is just waiting for someone to say, 'It's not your fault. It's not your shame. It happened to me. It happened to you.' And we extend the olive branch of healing."

Also in the audience are counselors, victim advocates and sometimes law enforcement officers, people who see victims of sexual assault every day. Innermotion hopes to make them aware of what survivors might be feeling.

"Innermotion is not just about 'look at all the terrible things that have happened,' but a look at how we can deal with it," says Linda Laviano, president of the Broward Victims Rights Coalition. "It's a very valuable outlet for victims. I've been in the audience where I've seen people react very strongly. The performances are very intense at a core emotional level, even though they always try to end with an uplifting message of healing."

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IF YOU GO

Innermotion: The Dance of Incest will be shown at 3:30 p.m. Saturday at Cinema Paradiso 503 SE Sixth St., Fort Lauderdale. Tickets are \$8 (\$6 for students, \$5 for FLIFF members), available at the door. The group will hold a workshop open to adult survivors on Nov. 22. For information, call 954-537-0636 or visit www.innermotion.org.

[Illustration]

PHOTO 5; Caption: NO SECRETS: The Innermotion troupe, top and above, seeks healing through theatrical performance for its members, including Janice O'Boyle, below. Each performance ends with an invitation to join them. Photos/Sylvie Rokab TELLING THE STORY: Sylvie Rokab, left, filmed Innermotion and founder Sharon Daugherty, above. Photo/Sylvie Rokab; Dennis Dean Photography