March 3, 2019

Empowering Healing in Community: Reflections on the Taping of “After Neverland” ...the Oprah Winfrey Special on “Leaving Neverland”

Howard Fradkin, Ph.D., WOR Facilitator Emeritus

Healing is infinitely accentuated when done in community. On Wednesday, February 27th, Oprah Winfrey once again empowered an entire community of survivors, their families and allies, as we sat together to tape a special show, “After Neverland.” That show will be aired on the OWN network 10 pm Monday, March 4th, following the airing of the documentary “Leaving Neverland” on HBO and OWN on Sunday and Monday evenings (and hopefully rebroadcast)

The taping of the show was made much more special for me because of a number of WOR alumni (at least 10 I know of) who were in the audience, including Anthony E, who was also featured on the show talking about his own abuse. Anthony is a Guest House alum. All of you who attended did so with very short notice and I greatly appreciate you making that extra commitment to be present. You came from Canada and all the way from the west coast, as well as close by to NYC. I want all of you who have attended a weekend I was honored to be a part of to know that the gifts you shared with the team and I are a large part of what fuels my passion to keep speaking OUR truth about abuse, grooming, the impact of abuse, and how to heal. Whether you were in the audience or not, know that your spirit, your wisdom, and your commitments to your own journey of healing inspired me during the taping.

As most of you know, Oprah chose me to be the expert guest for the 200 Men shows which aired in November, 2010. That was not only a life-changing moment for me, it was a life-changing moment for the male survivor moment. It was Oprah’s stated wish that those two programs would help open the doors to men everywhere to feel safe and empowered enough to speak their truths. Many of you joined us, and then when you left the weekends, either joined a support group in your community or started one. That explosion of healing energy all over the US and Canada made and continues to make a significant difference when men find the courage to ask for help.

Being invited to be a part of “After Neverland” was a great honor. I knew how important it was to help Oprah and the audience to understand how Michael Jackson (and many other perpetrators) refined the skill of grooming to such a level that he ensnared not only James and Wade, but also their families. It was important to emphasize how Michael had convinced them what he was doing to them were acts of love and how special they were and what a horrendous destructive lie that was. It was important to emphasize how terrified they were to speak their truth, and how Michael as part of his grooming had taught them to be loyal to dysfunction, his dysfunctional thinking and behaving. I talked about how he had convinced them they were responsible for his well-being and happiness, and how they could destroy him by speaking their truth. Most of you know my mantra: Healing is the process of learning to be disloyal to dysfunction and loyal to functionality. I talked about how Oprah, James and Wade, and the film’s director, Dan Reed, who also was on stage, had by the making of the documentary and the taping of this show demonstrated perfectly the steps of learning to be loyal to functionality.

The power of how destructive secrets are is a key part of the documentary and the Oprah show, both for James and Wade, as well as their family members. Each of you as an alumnus knows the power of breaking your silence to a room of people who believe and support you. That to me was one of the most moving parts of the day, when at the end, Wade and James told us how deeply they were moved by the love and support we shared with them as a community of survivors. Real healing took place for them, and
I am sure, for many in the room, and by extension, for all who have the opportunity to watch the documentary and the show.

It is my hope that as our movement continues to grow, and grow we must, as there are so many men and transmen still terrified to speak their truths. I encourage you to bring up the documentary and Oprah’s show as you move through the coming weeks. As Oprah warned us, there will be those who will attack James and Wade as gold diggers and liars. But we all know how extremely hard it is and how much courage it takes for each of us to finally say the words, Yes, Me Too!

My hope is that we can cut down the 20-30 years it takes on average for a survivor to feel able to speak their truth. I want to keep empowering us to be courageous activists and advocates who are committed as a part of our healing to be vocal in our communities. Let us join together and commit to expand the Me Too movement to include ALL survivors!