



## **The Impact of Child Pornography on Victims: True Stories**

### **Excerpts from “The Price of a Stolen Childhood” by Emily Bazelon**

Read the full article in *The New York Times* magazine, published January 24, 2013, [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com).

#### Nicole

“He started showing her child pornography when she was about 9, telling her that it was normal for fathers and daughters to ‘play games’ like in the pictures. Soon after, he started forcing her to perform oral sex and raping her, dressing her in tight clothes and sometimes binding her with ropes. When she turned 12, she told him to stop, but he used threats and intimidation to continue the abuse for about a year. He said that if she told anyone what he’d done, everyone would hate her for letting him. He said that her mother would no longer love her.

...

“[A local detective came] to Nicole’s house on that December day, to confirm that she was in fact the girl in the pictures that circulated around the globe. ‘It was the worst moment of my life,’ Nicole said of seeing the pictures of herself. ‘In a way, I didn’t remember it being that bad with my father — and then I saw that it was. Knowing that other people, all over, had seen me like that, I just froze. I could hear my mother crying, but I couldn’t cry.’ ...

“On one Web site... commenters described in detail the acts of rape and bondage Nicole had experienced. One called the videos ‘legendary.’ Another called her ‘an eager participant’ because her father instructed her to smile and talk in the videos. ‘The fact remains that she is the most searched for, sought after and downloaded ever,’ a third commenter wrote. ‘There are hours of video out there. It’s just too bad there are not more willing like her.’

“For Nicole, knowing that so many men have witnessed and taken pleasure from her abuse has been excruciating. ‘You have an image of yourself as a person, but here is this other image,’ she told me. ‘You know it’s not true, but all those other people will believe that it’s you — that this is who you really are.’ ...

“[In college] Nicole got a series of messages on Myspace from a man who said he had been looking for her for five years. He asked, ‘Want me to come visit u?’ When Nicole blocked him, he wrote to one of her friends on Myspace, telling her that Nicole was a ‘porn star’ — and sending two images. ‘That’s when I fully realized what it meant for these pictures to be out there,’ Nicole said. ‘I couldn’t get away from it, not really. I started getting paranoid and having nightmares.’ The man was arrested and went to prison, but Nicole couldn’t avoid the knowledge that other men were still looking at the sexual photos of her young self. Later that year, she got a

letter from the Victim Notification System at the Justice Department. Congress had passed a law in 2004 mandating that crime victims receive notice every time a suspect is arrested or has a court appearance. The letter was addressed to Nicole's mother and stepfather because she hadn't yet turned 18; it informed them that a man in California had been arrested for possessing a pornographic photo of her.... More arrests followed and more letters — piles of them. 'We stacked them in a laundry basket in a walk-in closet so I wouldn't have to see them,' Nicole said. 'Then there were more baskets, and we had to move them to the garage. It was really hard for me. I was still scared of my father, but I knew him. These other people, they were strangers, and there were so many of them.' ...

"At work she felt increasingly self-conscious around male customers. Had they seen her pictures? Were they like the man who stalked her on Myspace — were any of them coming to the store because they knew?"

### Amy

"Amy's parents took her to see [Attorney] Marsh, who had started the public-interest Children's Law Center in Washington. At their first meeting, he explained to Amy that the letters meant her pictures had been traded countless times online. 'I just felt so full of shame,' Amy said. 'I started wondering, Has he looked at them? He said he hadn't, and that made me feel better. But then I thought, Who has?' ...

"[Amy saw a forensic psychologist] who evaluated Amy and said she 'would need therapy throughout her life and could expect to work sporadically because of the likelihood of periodic setbacks.' [The psychologist] attributed these costs — Amy's damages — to her awareness of the ongoing downloading and viewing. 'Usually, we try to help survivors of child sexual abuse make a very strong distinction between the past and the present. The idea is to contain the harm: it happened then, and it's not happening anymore. But how do you do that when these images are still out there? The past is still the present, which turns the hallmarks of treatment on their head,'" said [the psychologist].