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## Mother to offer cautionary account of family sexual abuse

By: Jessica Selby , Kent County Daily Times

As a substance abuse and violence prevention counselor since the early 1990s, Coventry resident Claire Silva said she should have noticed the signs.

Her two boys, ages 4 and 2 at the time, were sexually abused by their 11-year-old stepbrother. The abuse took place in the family's home, late at night while the boys' parents slept. It continued for a year and a half.

"Physically and mentally, there were things showing up that I couldn't figure out," Silva said. "I should have been able to recognize the warning signals, but I didn't, not for about a year and a half."

Silva and her husband, Bob, a Cape Verdean, met in 1995 at a local club. Bob had traveled to America for work and was forced to leave his 5-year-old son, Adam, in their native country. In 1997 Claire and Bob married. They spent much time contemplating ways to bring Adam to America, but work schedules and finances were a constant restraint until 2001. That year they made the journey to Cape Verde with their first son, Joey, to bring Adam back to America.

Adam's initial immersion into the Silva family did not go as smoothly as the family had hoped. There were issues with Adam's behavior right from the start, Silva said.

"Adam never admitted that he broke something or made a mess. He could not make the connection between his actions and the consequences," Silva writes in her book, "A Child's Heart Speaks." "He created masterful lies declaring his innocence. It was as if he truly believed his own fabrications."

During Adam's residence with the Silvas, Claire became pregnant with their second son, David.

Meanwhile, Adam's constant defiance continued. At times it would escalate and at other times it would diminish, but it never disappeared, according to Silva.

"Adam is basically a sociopath," Silva said. "Behind the scenes you would see his true personality, but, on the surface, he seemed like a sweet, gentle little boy. This is the case of most perpetrators."

Silva identifies Adam as a perpetrator now but, at the time the abuse was occurring, she believed him to be nothing more than a teen struggling with his early teen years, she said. Once the truth of his actions finally came to the surface, the Silvas confronted their son, who admitted what he had done to his stepbrothers.

Silva captures the journey of her family's discovery of the abuse to their establishment of coping mechanisms in her self-published book "A Child's Heart Speaks, Surviving Sexual Abuse." In the book, Silva also interviews other survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Her goal in writing the book, she said, is to help educate parents, offer support for survivors and educate officials who, like herself, feel they would be keen to the signs. According to Silva, there is currently not much available for parents of survivors of incestuous sexual abuse and her book, she said, is a means to offer a coping mechanism. Silva will be openly discussing the sexual abuse her two children endured while in the security of the own home, how this traumatic situation affected them and her entire family and how writing the book helped her to heal at a lecture at Salon Serenity on Tiogue Avenue on Monday evening, Jan. 16, at 6 p.m. She will have copies of her book available for sale that evening, as well as free time at the end of the discussion to speak with those who wish to talk with her.

"One of my goals with the lecture at Salon Serenity is to help others in need who may be struggling in their lives or know someone else who is struggling," Silva said.