

Shame hates it when we reach out and tell our story. It hates having words wrapped around it - it can't survive being shared. Shame loves secrecy.' - Brene Brown

Meet Jane Epstein

5 words to describe her:

- Courageous
- Tenacious
- Passionate
- Compassionate
- Empathetic

Jane Epstein is a speaker, a writer, an advocate, a mother, and a survivor of sibling sexual abuse (SSA).

Jane first disclosed her abuse to her mother when she was in her late 20s. Her mom cried and said, "I believe you. How did this happen? How did I not know?" They both tucked it back away, where Jane pushed it aside, thinking the abuse hadn't impacted her that much. It stayed in that tidy box until Jane was 40-years old and a mother of two toddlers.

Jane could no longer hide her truth. Being sexually abused by her older sibling had affected her life significantly. She began to research sibling sexual abuse and the internet was often silent on the issue. Despite the lack of resources, Jane knew she wasn't alone.

"I started sharing my story on social media, and through podcasts; I started receiving daily messages from survivors, parents, and even those who had caused harm to another sibling. I felt a call to share with society and parents about this danger in their own homes. But there was a problem. SSA was still a dark and taboo subject, and they met me with silence. I needed to get louder. Then an answer came to me. What about TEDx?"

Jane landed an opportunity to speak on TEDx. Her talk is titled [Giving Voice to Sibling Sexual Abuse](#).

Jane reached the stage and her words spilled out effortlessly. She didn't speak too quickly and she didn't forget to breathe. At the end of her talk, she iterated the words, "And if you're a survivor.....I hear you....I believe you....You are not alone."

People from the audience approached Jane when she finished. One woman said, “Thank you for talking about this. My husband is here with me, and I almost left because I thought it might trigger me. I’m so glad I stayed. When does the hurt go away? When will I stop crying?” Jane held her.

Another audience member approached her and said, “Thank you for your talk. It was powerful. The person next to me left right after your talk. They said they had to get home and tell their spouse that this happened to them.”

Jane has shared her story with the world and has courageously brought awareness to sibling sexual abuse. She also shares advice to survivors who are weighing the decision of whether or not to come forward with their own stories.

“It takes courage, and it is challenging to heal, it can even be exhausting, but there is hope and healing. I think it’s a good idea to have a professional to support you. The difficulty with sibling sexual abuse and trauma is it is a family trauma. It impacts the survivor, the person who caused harm, and the parents. Many children harmed by sibling sexual trauma never tell anyone about it, and others don’t come forward until their parents are deceased.”

She continued to reflect on her life and what has been most helpful to her healing.

“...As I began to write, I realized my life had happened out of order, and it was no wonder I was confused and depressed. I knew more than a child should know about sexual things at such a young age, which changed the trajectory of my life and made me more susceptible to sexual assault later in life. However, once I realized the impact of the sexual abuse, I began sharing my story, and I became stronger. As I owned my story with grace, instead of trying to outrun it, the shame lessened, one layer at a time, and I realized the shame I had been carrying was not my shame to carry. And as I became more vocal, I met other survivors and advocates, which provided an opportunity to become co-founder of both IncestAWARE.org and 5WAVES, an international advocacy group at siblingsexualtrauma.com.”

Jane encourages survivors with one final message.

“If you can find a way to share your story with someone you trust, whether that is in writing, in a survivor group, or even sharing anonymously, it will start to lessen

the pain one layer at a time.

It takes courage and it is challenging to heal, it can be exhausting, but there is hope and healing.