

## THE DEAFENING SILENCE

**By Sherry Niermann, Executive Director Mary's Hope Workshops**

When adult survivors first begin their healing work, friends and family can make or break the healing journey. A survivor told of feeling as though her friends, neighbors, church community and family had turned their backs on her when she broke the silence of her childhood sexual trauma.

In Trauma and Recovery, author Judith Herman talks about trauma and the responses to it. She says that when traumatic events are natural disasters, like fires, floods, tornados or hurricanes, the entire community lines up behind the victims to support them in ways that are astonishing. "But when the traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It's morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The observer is forced to take sides. So frequently, it's the side of the perpetrator that's taken. Because all the perpetrator asks is that the bystander does nothing."

The victim, on the other hand, asks the bystander to acknowledge the pain, to take an action, to respond in some way. But, too often, the bystanders stand-by silently, saying and doing nothing. The old adage - see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil – takes over. In the face of evil, they say nothing. For adult survivors of childhood sexual trauma, the silence speaks volumes and volumes. It speaks of indifference, of alignment with the perpetrator, of blame for the victim. The silence reinforces old feelings of abandonment and isolation. This silence is deafening to the soul of the survivor. Sometimes this silence is so profound, the survivor will stop, or at least postpone, the journey toward wholeness.

Do you know adult survivors? They need your support and encouragement for the hard work of healing ahead. They will crave your love and compassion and understanding. You can be an invaluable companion as you journey with an adult survivor.