

My Sister, Lisa Montgomery, Took a Life. Her Own Was Scarred by Unimaginable Abuse. Spare Her | Opinion

Diane Mattingly

I'm bruised, but I'm not broken. My sister, Lisa Montgomery, is broken. On December 8, the federal government plans to execute her for a crime she committed in the grip of severe mental illness after a lifetime of living hell. She does not deserve to die.

As the oldest, I was the protector of Lisa and our baby sister. When Judy, Lisa's mother and my stepmother, came to beat us, I stood between her and the younger girls and took the beating, whether it was belts, cords or hangers. We lived in a house of horrors.

Judy was an alcoholic with mental illness who married six times over the course of her life. There were always different men around the house. When I was around eight years old, and Lisa was about four, one of Judy's male friends began coming into our room at night and regularly raping me, with Lisa in the next bed—close enough we could reach for each other and touch fingers.

When I was eight and Lisa was four, social services came and rescued me from Judy, leaving Lisa and our other sister behind. I was put in foster care with a wonderful family. The father was a teacher. There was plenty of food, our clothes were clean, and the kids did our homework together. I couldn't believe how good it felt to be part of a loving family. It turns out that it only takes a few people to save a child's life: being loved by my foster parents saved mine.

Being loved unconditionally helped me heal, find a caring husband, and raise two children who have hearts of gold. While my path to healing was very hard, the difference between Lisa and me is that no one ever intervened to rescue Lisa from a lifetime of abuse.

Judy drank throughout her pregnancy with Lisa and caused her to be born with brain damage. Lisa's and my father was also mentally ill. When Lisa was a small child, Judy allowed men to rape her for money, including allowing her to be gang raped on multiple occasions. She told Lisa she had to "earn her keep."

Judy later married a man named Jack who punched, kicked and choked his children, including Lisa. Jack also raped Lisa for years. He threatened to rape our little sister if Lisa resisted and said he would kill her whole family if she told anyone. All the while, Lisa's mother was being paid to let strange men rape Lisa.

In addition to her brain damage, Lisa developed multiple mental disorders, including bipolar disorder, temporal lobe epilepsy, dissociative disorder, and Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. A lifetime of sexual torture causes her to lose touch with reality.

At 18, Judy pressured Lisa to marry her stepbrother. He continued the cycle of abuse, rapes and beatings, which he sadistically videotaped. After she gave birth to four children, Judy pressured Lisa into an involuntary sterilization. She lived with her children in poverty, without running water and other basic necessities, while her mental health deteriorated.

Two days before the crime, her former husband (and stepbrother) sought custody of two of her children. At the time, Lisa had told her new husband that she was pregnant, which her former husband knew wasn't possible because of the forced sterilization. He threatened to expose the imagined pregnancy and use it against her in the custody battle.

The threat of losing her children, combined with the years of untreated trauma and severe mental illness, pushed Lisa over the edge. In the haze of her mental illness, she went to the home of a pregnant woman, killed her, and removed the baby. Lisa then took the baby home and cared for her as though she was her own. The crime itself shows that Lisa had lost all touch with reality.

My heart goes out to the family of Bobbie Jo Stinnett and the loss that they have felt and are still feeling.

But my hope is President Trump will stop Lisa's execution and commute her sentence to life in prison. She is not the "worst of the worst" for whom the death penalty was intended. She is the most broken of the broken.

Diane Mattingly is the sister of Lisa Montgomery, who is scheduled for execution by the federal government on December 8, 2020.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own.