



Office of the Texas Governor Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force

Survivor Voices

WE, as survivor leaders in our service to and as part of the Governor's Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force's (SASTF) Services for Male Survivors Working Group, wanted the opportunity to write an article about our survivorship. We decided to describe what 'Becoming Whole' means by focusing on two (2) words that represented 'Becoming Whole'. The following are three different paths in our journey of healing and 'Becoming – Whole.'

Mr. Marcus Reese ~ *Stretch and Heal* ~

Becoming whole again after experiencing sexual abuse is a complicated and unique journey. Having sexual abuse happen as a child is even more challenging because a child's path is still being developed.

Stretch /streCH/verb/straighten or extend one's body or a part of one's body to its full length, typically so as to tighten one's muscles or in order to reach something. Be made or be capable of being made longer or wider without tearing or breaking.

What I've learned and leaned into most is the ability to stretch.

In my profession as a tennis coach and player stretching is integral to a player's growth and development. In the same way I've had to stretch myself from a past of hurt and abuse to a place of being whole.

Some days that looks like advocating for victims and helping them find their voice. Other days it looks like taking mental health days that include hiking, massages, gardening and catching up with friends. The great thing about



stretching is that we all can do it a little each day and be a better version of ourselves than we were the day before.

Healing / 'hēliNG/noun/ the process of making or becoming sound or healthy again.

On the journey to become whole again, I would be remiss to not mention healing. The very mention of being a survivor of sexual abuse would imply that some level of healing is necessary.

After the closure and guilty conviction of my abuser in 2021, I was in a place of wanting to repair my life. The approach I took was to start with areas of my life that my abuser had damaged, and one by one create new memories.

An example of that is when my abuser took my love of basketball as a child and used it as a weapon of silence. She would tell me that if I kept her secret, she would take me to my first NBA game. I kept her secrets for 20 years.

Last year I purchased my own ticket to a San Antonio Spurs game. As I walked into that arena that hurt place that my abuse once occupied started to heal. One by one I will create healing where hurt used to occupy. Removing as many of the hurts and becoming a more whole version of myself along the way.



When I'm not advocating for sexual assault survivors you can find me at a cozy coffee shop, gardening, fishing, or trying new recipes on the grill.

In my profession you can find me on the tennis court as a coach and player.

~ Warm Regards, Marcus Reese

Marcus Reese is the president of the Taylor Area Tennis Association. The purpose of this non-profit is to promote and grow tennis in the Taylor area regardless of socioeconomic status or age. Marcus is a certified tennis teaching professional since 2016. Achieving National rankings, he now lends his expertise to advancing the level of play to Junior and Adults alike. Reese is also an Advocate in the fight against Child Sexual Abuse. From organizing events to raise awareness, to speaking and engaging the public on how to take a more preventive measure.

Mr. Mikey Betancourt **~ Complete and Restored ~**



The journey of healing and 'Becoming Whole' has been a continual process with many peaks and valleys. My journey as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse has brought me to a place of being complete and restored. It's those moments of retrospection I become in awe of how the journey has led me to my life's work, serving and advocating for the most vulnerable, and has supported my healing. I'm humbled and honored to share that when I look in the mirror these days, I don't see a fragmented, sometime fearful, lost, and broken, 4-year-old little boy, yet I stand in that mirror as a strong, kind, and loving 47-year-old survivor complete and restored.

Complete / kəm'plēt/ adjective/ having all the necessary or appropriate parts.

I am complete in acts of love, kindness, and affection. I am complete when I share humor, jokes, and laughter. I am complete when I lend an ear and listen, share inspiration and motivational thoughts, and act as a voice for those that are momentarily silenced. I am complete when I can bring change agents together to serve children and families through identifying resources and collectively filling in gaps. My mom's strength and love for us and for her 'Barbies' (great grand Twins) completes me. My village of family, friends, and colleagues complete me.

Restored / ri-stohrd / adjective / to bring back.

I am restored seeing the next generation of my family members build foundations of success in life, excelling in school, sports, businesses, careers, and raising their own healthy, happy families. Running, hiking, floating the river, being outdoors, enjoying nature and the goodness of people restores me. Restoration for me is seeing the beauty in imperfections in people and life. Being called and known as 'Uncle' in my family and especially being the 'Kuncle' to my precious grand twin nieces (Jocelyn and Paisley). My life's work of serving children and families who have experienced abuse and trauma restores me.

I am complete and restored in the presence of my God. I couldn't have made it this far without Him and He has plans for me (Jeremiah 29:11) and you.

The abusers in my life couldn't keep me from becoming who I'm supposed to be in this world.



***I am complete and restored
because it's who I was made to
be; it's who YOU were made to be
– Complete, Restored, and
Whole!
~ Humbly, Mikey Betancourt ~***

Mikey has served children and families for the last twenty years in various capacities at six Child Advocacy Centers in Texas and enjoys his current role as a Regional Principal with Children Advocacy Centers of Texas (CACTX). He loves spoiling and spending time with his family, especially his grand twins who are adorable. Mikey enjoys being active, loves running, playing sports, being outdoors, and always looking for a new experience in life.



Mr. Arturo Mireles ~ *Repaired and Relentless* ~

Repaired *Irə'per/ verb past tense/ fix or mend (a thing suffering from damage or a fault).*

Being repaired shows me how resilient I am. Kintsugi is a Japanese art form that takes patience, love and care as it is the process of repairing broken pottery with lacquer and gold. The vessel symbolizes our lives, the lacquer represents our support systems like family, and the gold signifies the therapies that turn the pain into power. Kintsugi art does not hide the damage, it acknowledges it and finds beauty in the resilience from the repair. The vessel becomes not only unique, but more valuable from the repair.



Relentless *Irə'len(t)ləs/adjective/ indicates persistence, perseverance, commitment, and fortitude.*

Being relentless is ingrained in my character from enlisting in the United States Army Infantry and serving a combat deployment to bring peace to

Afghanistan during their 2014 elections. Democracy is threatened when Military Sexual Trauma is prevalent in our Military as it is a force divider because it eats at the trust of command as well as unit cohesion. When I finally stood up for myself to address the sexual harassment and sexual assault I experienced in the Army, I found that my voice matters because I learned that I'm not alone as other Infantrymen in my unit that I served with finally acknowledged their trauma as well. Being relentless gave me strength to fight for my justice by reporting to law enforcement and advocating for others.



"Before healing others, heal yourself."

-Lao Tzu



Arturo Mireles is a Combat Infantryman and Military Sexual Trauma Survivor. He volunteers his time to various organizations to amplify their voices to create change for a better world. On his off time he loves to ride motorcycles, lift weights, and loves to learn. He earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film and Television Production, an Associates of Arts in Business and is on his way towards earning a Bachelor of Science in Business and a Master's in Business Administration.

We are privileged to have shared a little bit of us with you all. We hope this brings hope, light, and love to those who read.

We want to close by challenging you!

What are your two (2) words for Becoming/Being Whole?