

## ***The Lasting Harm* by Lucia Osborne-Crowley**

### **Prologue**

The Floridian heat overwhelms me as I step out of Miami International Airport and begin to make my way to the airport hotel. The air is heavy and full of moisture, the hot wind carrying an ominous feeling, a sense of dread. My flight out of Heathrow was delayed by several hours due to the queen's death and so I have missed my train to West Palm Beach, and instead am staying in a hotel for the night and finishing my journey in the morning. Already, this trip feels doomed.

I am here because, a few weeks ago, I sent an email to a lawyer named Jack Scarola about his client, who is known only by her first name – Carolyn. Carolyn, who is now 36, was sexually abused by Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell, beginning when she was just 14 years old. Carolyn testified at Maxwell's trial using only her first name to protect herself and her family from the disastrous consequences that too often come with speaking out. Carolyn has also never spoken at length to a journalist before.

When I emailed Scarola asking to interview Carolyn, I did not expect that she would say yes. But I nonetheless sat down and wrote, as I always do, a long email about all the ways I ensure that my journalism is trauma-informed and that my interview style is safe, sensitive, and always puts victims' needs and comfort first. I also, as I always do, disclosed that I myself am a survivor of child sexual abuse and have dedicated my investigative reporting skills to trying to contribute to a better understanding of the scourge of sexual abuse and its long shadow.

To my great surprise, Carolyn responded to Scarola almost immediately.

'Please tell this journalist I would love to speak to her for her book and to call me ASAP.' Before long, Carolyn and I had spoken on the phone and arranged for me to fly to West Palm Beach to see her.

In the airport hotel that night, I reflect on how surreal it feels to be meeting with Carolyn after thinking about her so regularly for almost a year, ever since hearing her testimony on the stand at Ghislaine Maxwell's federal sex trafficking trial in December of 2021. Her story affected me so deeply, and I feel honoured that she is willing to share more of her story with me; that she is willing to trust me with the intimate details of the worst things that have ever happened to her.

Carolyn's story was arguably the most important testimony in the Maxwell trial, for several reasons. First, because the charges associated with Carolyn's story carried by far the longest sentence – the two charges that relied on her evidence carried a total sentence of 40 years, whereas the charges associated with the other victims' stories carried between 5 and 15 years.

That's because Carolyn was trafficked by Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell between 2001 and 2004, making her ordeal the latest of the four, with the other three victims being abused in the 1990s. When Maxwell and Epstein abused Jane, Kate and Annie – the other victims who testified at the trial – no substantive federal law existed criminalising sex trafficking. By the time Epstein and Maxwell abused Carolyn – unbeknown to them – a federal sex trafficking act had been passed that significantly toughened sentences for the offence. So it was that by the time Maxwell was charged for her crimes, 20 years later, the crimes she committed against Carolyn would be the only ones that could attract a substantive sex trafficking charge.

But there's a more important reason why Carolyn's story was crucial to bringing Ghislaine Maxwell to justice: because it laid bare, in an excruciatingly honest way, just how severe the life-long effects of

trauma really are, because Carolyn hid nothing from the jury about her life. Her testimony was raw, honest, unfiltered and completely heartbreaking.

Carolyn's story perfectly captures the way that trauma in childhood completely alters the course of our lives; the way it leaves us vulnerable to addiction, self-loathing and more trauma; the way it traps us in a cycle of violence and shame; the way it refuses to let us go.

So here I am, almost a year after verdict day, sitting on a Greyhound bus from Miami to West Palm Beach, to meet Carolyn in the flesh. To meet the person who contributed to changing the course of history.

As the bus makes its journey south down the Floridian coast, I get out my notebook from the trial and I review Carolyn's testimony, to make sure I am familiar with her story for our interview.

Carolyn has requested that I book a hotel room for our interview so that we can have some privacy. That afternoon, we meet at the hotel. I recognise her immediately, of course, from the witness stand, but what I didn't expect is that she would recognise me, too.

'Oh, I remember you from the trial!' she says excitedly, and hugs me. 'You were the person I chose to look at every time my husband had to leave the courtroom to go to the bathroom.'

We hug for a long time, and I thank her for being willing to speak to me.

The following day, we sit down in Carolyn's hotel room to begin our interview. Carolyn is open, warm and kind. When she asks me why I am interested in the Maxwell trial, I answer honestly.

'I was sexually abused and groomed as a child,' I say. 'And I'm still living with the effects of it. I want the world to understand it better.'

Carolyn's face changes and becomes even kinder and more open than it had been before.

'I'm so sorry that happened to you,' she says, very seriously. 'I'm so, so sorry. It's so unfair.'

Our eyes are locked together now, and she walks across the hotel room and hugs me. She is limping, because she has a terrible leg injury, but her hug is fierce and certain.

'I'm so sorry,' she says again. 'You didn't deserve that.' 'Neither did you,' I say, holding her tightly and wondering, not for the first or last time while reporting for this book, how people who have lived through so much still have so much empathy to offer.

'What kind of consequences have you had to face from your abuse?' Carolyn asks me in a quiet voice. 'Have you ever struggled with drugs?'

'Yes,' I say truthfully. 'I have had many periods in my life of struggling with opioid addiction. I have a chronic pain condition, so I always have easy access to painkillers.'

'Ah, yes,' she says knowingly. 'I've been there.'

Later that afternoon, her injured leg begins hurting. 'I have Tylenol if you want some,' I offer.

'Oh, thank you so much,' she says. My handbag rattles as I dig around for the bottle. 'Are you sure it's just Tylenol you've got in there?' she asks. 'You've got me looking out for you now.' 'Just Tylenol, I promise,' I say, and we smile broadly at each other, the warmth of shared understanding passing between us. 'Everything I said on that stand was true,' she says. 'You can put it all in your book.' 'Thank you,' I say.