

It has taken me a long time to write this, I have written and rewritten and gone back to the drawing board. It is a very hard thing that I am trying to communicate with you here today and I want to get it right. So, I will be blunt, because being direct never hurt. What Tony did to me caused me a lot of pain. I lost a lot. During the time that it was happening not only were the feelings I had about myself negative, but my family was broken, many friendships were shattered and life was pretty unbearable. I held on to one dream, my dream of basketball because I thought it would make everything ok. I thought that maybe it would make the pain of the horrible sacrifices he forced me to make worth it. But it wasn't and the dream was not all it was cracked up to be. Basketball, I realized, is just a game and its supposed to fun and enjoyable. When I realized that, a new time began in me. I knew I had to get out but didn't know how, because by then I had been in Players Only for almost four years and I had no one in my life to get the support to escape. Thankfully, someone came into my life who saw through to the truth and cared about me enough to not stand for it. His name is Julian and with his love and support, I was able to turn my back on Players Only and finally escape. While this was liberating because I was finally free from Tony's abuse and oppressiveness, a new dawn of pain and suffering was thrust upon me. It was very painful in the beginning to reconcile what had been done to me. I felt dirty, disgusting and blamed myself. I felt that if I had somehow done something different, maybe I would not have been such easy prey for him. But in my heart I knew, that that was not true. The one thing that kept me going was the main motivation for coming forward in the first place. That motivation was not wanting another girl to ever have to feel the pain I had felt. I never wanted another girl to be abused. But to make things even harder, the simple fact of me coming forward with the truth of what had been done to me, cost me more pain, it lost me all of my friends from Players Only. The very people I wanted to protect, many of them are

victims and are still trapped by Tony. That is one of the hardest things of all. To have friends hate you, when you care about them so much. And I understand how hard it is for them. Because Tony is an amazing basketball coach and he has been able to shape many girls into outstanding basketball players. It is just unfortunate that he doesn't recognize or cannot recognize where to draw the line.

Time has healed me because while I stood alone in the beginning, others have been able to finally have a voice for what has been done to them. Over time, I was able to reconcile myself to what happened. And that means for me today is a great day because today I can close the book on what has happened and say "this is not my life, this is just something bad that happened". Today, I am no longer a victim, I am a survivor. And I am lucky, because I am only 21 years old and I have gone through one of the toughest things imaginable and I have dealt with it. I have decided not to let it run or ruin my life. If I had remained in Players Only and continued to be abused and oppressed by Tony, my life would have been a constant struggle, a grand façade to hide the shameful truth. And for what? Why did all of this ever happen? Over a game, basketball. Now, I look back and I feel silly that something so trivial gave someone like Tony so much power to hurt me. I still love basketball, but I am able to see that nothing is so important that you should sacrifice yourself for it. I want to say that I am very proud of everyone who had the strength to stand up against Tony. And I hope that those who are still suffering can hear me today when I say, when that time comes when you must face the pain of what has been done to you, I am still your friend, I will be there. I am just glad that Tony won't. Today is a good day. Thank you.