An Open Letter to the Shambhala Community from Long-Serving Kusung

To the Shambhala community:

This letter is in regards to Mipham J. Mukpo, also known as Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. For the purposes of this letter, we will refer to him as Mr. Mukpo.

In light of the recently concluded investigations and subsequent communications from the Shambhala leadership, a group of former Kusung decided to come forward and highlight areas we do not feel were fully or properly addressed.

By way of background, the Dorje Kasung is the quasi-military group in Shambhala tasked with protecting the teachings and the community. The Kusung, meaning "body protectors," are a subset of the Dorje Kasung who are tasked with the direct care of Mr. Mukpo's body, on all levels. Accordingly, the Kusung are witness to Mr. Mukpo's private life.

Becoming a Kusung is only by invitation of Mr. Mukpo. He requires loyalty, confidentiality, and allegiance to his view. More often than not he also requires Vajrayana samaya vows. Within the Dorje Kusung there are Continuity Kusung who travel and live with Mr. Mukpo for about a year, serving him 24/7. There are very few people in Shambhala who spend as much time with Mr. Mukpo.

We are all former Kusung who have held multiple leadership roles in the Shambhala community some of which we have listed below our names. Although we are a small contingent of former servants, our collective direct experience with Mr. Mukpo spans from 1994 to 2018.

Serving in these capacities has afforded us both intimate exposure to Mr. Mukpo's conduct and ongoing access to those who've continued to serve or served after our duties concluded. Each of us has gradually distanced ourselves from the inner circle for a variety of reasons, primarily an overwhelming need for self-care. Most of us have left the community entirely.

In conversation with each other, and with many other former Court (personal household) staff, we've concluded that Mr. Mukpo has consistently shown a disturbing pattern of behavior.

Given Mr. Mukpo's position as sole authority of Shambhala, we feel a moral obligation to alert others in order to avoid further harm and provide direct unfiltered feedback to Mr. Mukpo. The following summary highlights key observations and represents our own collective opinion. Attached to the end of this letter are six individual accounts that contributed to our general assessment.

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Ms. Bath from Wickwire Holm had a very narrow mandate for her investigation. However, we know that abuse is generally underreported which speaks to a much wider epidemic in the Shambhala community. This seeming effort to downplay the number and severity of incidents is corroborated by Ms. Merchasin's investigation. We can confirm that Mr. Mukpo has a long history of sexual misconduct including those Claimants in the final Wickwire Holm report. While some of us did talk to the investigators about these allegations we feel that much was not fully addressed.

Mr. Mukpo has a long-standing history of questionable behavior towards his students, ranging from crude harmful speech to physical and psychological abuse. This has occurred both while he was drinking heavily and in the absence of alcohol. He has also consistently propagated misuse of organizational funds. In our opinion, his abuse of power goes far beyond the limited scope of the Wickwire Holm investigation.

We know Mr. Mukpo received feedback about his behavior from various key people at different times. He either dismissed or was unable to heed the warnings and continued to engage in these activities. We are concerned that Mr. Mukpo is unlikely to change.

Most of us have been subjected to his abuse. At times we have also been inadvertent enablers of Mr. Mukpo's behavior. We have each struggled to understand our blind spots. It is a bitter pill to swallow that we were enablers of this man. The more we ignored our own intuition, the more people were harmed, and the more damage was propagated. As was true for us, many other Shambhala leaders may not recognize their role in the propagation of these harms. Indeed many are victims themselves.

While we cannot undo the damage, hopefully we can speak to the truth of how his behavior has hurt many of his students. We seek to further validate those who have bravely named this pattern and who likely were subjected to gaslighting or minimization. We hope our personal statements will encourage others to speak and keep speaking.

Although the Shambhala community is making changes in some areas of leadership, as well as reviewing finances, ethical conduct, and reporting policies, we doubt that these changes will be enough. Our concern is that these efforts may only act as a mere gesture of change if the center of the community cannot face the deep discomfort of its own culpability.

Currently, Mr. Mukpo is still the monarch and lineage guru in Shambhala. This is why we felt it necessary for us to be open about what we have witnessed. He is not solely defined by the terrible things – if he was this would all be much simpler. Nonetheless, we feel compelled to draw the line here – where the disparity gap between what he, as a spiritual leader, says to do and what he himself does, is so wide as to appear immeasurable.

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We have been told (and have told ourselves) in many different ways how to obscure this line. Often there is a theme of imploring us to believe that Mr. Mukpo's behavior is beyond our understanding. We are asked to regard such activity as the guru's method of waking us up. But, looking around the world, there's nothing so prosaic as a leader using his power and position to take advantage of people under his care. By endorsing this letter we are both affirming these words and standing in support of those who've been exploited or harmed.

The forthcoming statements from six of the undersigned are intensely personal accounts from people who were trained to focus on Mr. Mukpo's needs above all else, even if it meant burying what we saw or felt. It has taken this long for us to come forward because the journey was replete with self-doubt, shame, and grief. This group as a whole has no affiliation with any particular movement, support

group, or any other organization. Although there are other Kusung staff who were interested in endorsing this letter, we do not claim to represent or speak for all other Kusung.

Sincerely,

Craig Morman

Kusung (1997-2015)

Continuity Kusung (2002-2003)

Ben Medrano, MD

Former Continuity Kusung and practicing board certified Psychiatrist

Laura Leslie

(2002-2016) Kusung-in-Training, Shabchi (Attendant to Mr. Mukpo's wife), staff member at Shambhala New York City and Dorje Denma Ling, Aide to the Council of the Makkyi Rabjam (Leaders of the Dorje Kasung), Meditation Instructor and Shambhala Guide, Rusung at the Boulder Shambhala Center, Board Member at Shambhala Mountain Center.

Louis Fitch

(2000-2016) Kasung, Desung, Kusung-in-Training, Boulder Rusung, Kasung Regimental Commander, Sun Camp Leadership Group, Colorado Sun Camp Admin, Personal Attendant to Lady Konchok, Co-Team Leader for Lady Konchok.

David Ellerton

Environment staff, Shambhala Mountain Center (2000-2001)

Continuity Kusung (2001-2002)

Resident Director of Shambhala Training, Shambhala Meditation Center of Denver (2003-2004)

Dragon Region Kusung Officer (2006-2008)

Allya Canepa

(1994-2018) Kusung, Camp Commander, Head of Household - Vermont,

Boulder, Shambhala Mountain, Chile; and briefly, at the end, Dragon Region Kusung Commander; Karmê Chöling Accounting Office (1993-1999), Windhorse Dressage Academy (1999-2002), Marpa House Director (2003-2006) Privy Purse (2006-2010), Ashoka Credit Union CEO (2012-2016).

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Ben Medrano

February 2019

My name is Dr. Ben Medrano and I was a Continuity Kusung to Mr. Mukpo from December 2002 to October 2004. I was one of 2 such attendants and we were almost always steps away from him offering services including personal security, workout partner, butler, secretary and counselor. Prior to this, my sporadic Kusung training occurred at various programs starting at the 2000 Vajradhatu seminary where I was recruited and trained. Before that I had never met or studied with him. In fact, I knew very little about any aspect of his personal life other than he wore robes instead of the suits of his father. It's worth noting that I was not born into this community and my participation started around the age of 19. Following my 2-year tour as his Continuity Kusung, I moved to Boulder to begin my own path towards becoming a physician specialized in psychiatry. I continued to be intimately involved in Mr. Mukpo's household as a Kusung staff supervisor (Kusung commander) for many land center programs on an annual basis for the years following until the summer of 2011. From about 2005 to 2007 I was a regional Kusung commander for programs mostly in the Colorado area. During that time I was involved in recruitment and training of many other Kusung, some of which are still serving to this day. Upon acceptance to medical school in the summer of 2010, my service and contact with him became limited to only a couple of campaigns in total, each a month in duration with the last being at his Boulder household around December 2013 to January 2014. For those who care, my vajrayana path included traditional Kagyu Ngondro by numbers, Shambhala Ngondro, Vajrayogini and multiple Scorpion Seal Assemblies. Following my acceptance into psychiatric

residency training I've had no direct involvement in his administrative or personal spheres. However, I did maintain my strong friendships and frequent communication with many who continued to serve him and his family. I've been a trusted confidant about their experiences, which allowed me a limited vantage point to continue to stay tuned-in. Prior to the release of Buddhist Project Sunshine I was not aware of the extent of harm experienced by these women and many of my former colleagues.

My retirement from service was a result of years of contemplation from which I'd concluded that it was necessary for me to no longer have direct contact with Mr. Mukpo and much of his inner circle. This period of time away from the community while training in psychiatry allowed me a unique perspective of Shambhala and it's leader's inner world. In light of the Project Sunshine and Wickwire Holm reports, and after reading Mr. Mukpo's and other's statements, I came to realized that sharing my experience was necessary in this process of reconciliation. The primary catalyst for me was knowing that others have suffered for years and many more are suffering as important questions remain unanswered. I was concerned by the fact that many key close personal staff, prior to Mr. Mukpo's marriage, had remained silent. Furthermore, a substantial portion of the Kusung were born and raised into Shambhala, attending numerous annual military-style summer camps during their vulnerable developmental years.

The following is an account of what I observed during my time in direct service to Mr. Mukpo from 2000 to 2014 with particular focus on my time as a Continuity Kusung. Please note that any period outside of my 2-year traveling tour consisted of varied week to month long campaigns where contact with him was far more limited, as I was doing occasional service shifts or supervising other Kusung. I will try to give an honest account of my observations and context, while reserving the bulk of my personal interpretations for the latter portion of this report. Its important for me to disclose that I was socialized within this spiritual institution for over 20 years and

this definitely contributes to bias. For the last 5 years, I also have had no direct contact with Mr. Mukpo or members of the Kalapa Council and they have not attempted to reach out to me.

From the summer of 2000 to late 2002 I'm guessing I'd accrued a total of approximately 2 months of direct service time to Mr. Mukpo. Much of this training occurred at Shambhala Mountain Center, Dorje Denma Ling and Karme Choling. During those periods I do remember seeing him consume copious amounts of alcohol at occasional social events. When I say occasional, there were a few for every month of service I did. At these events I also witnessed dancing, singing, poetry, toasts and one-on-one close conversation between teacher and student. I clearly recall seeing young attractive women being invited to social events and I remember witnessing him flirting with them in the manner of placing his hand on thighs or shoulders. I don't remember seeing any groping of buttocks, breasts or vaginas. I was aware of women being invited to his private quarters and had on occasion seen them leave the morning thereafter. If now asked to describe their facial expressions on these occasions I would list a whole range of affects from elation and anxiety to sadness and shame. Rarely did I see women arise from his bedroom looking calm, happy and refreshed. This pretty much sums up all of my observations of women departing after nights spent for the years thereafter.

Prior to starting my tour as a Continuity Kusung, I had a surprise visit from Mr. Mukpo and entourage. This was the first time I was fully able to appreciate his voluminous consumption of alcohol during a binge (easily above 10 drinks). He drank from sunset to sunrise, as he would behave in a provocative manner ranging from being gentle and vulnerable to being threatening and insecure. I will elaborate more on these observations later. I don't remember him physically harming people at this time. His behavior included demanding others to drink more and coercing some participants to take off their clothes. His behavior towards me during this time was inviting and flattering. From what I could tell he did his best to make me feel welcome. Not long after, I received an invitation to travel with him full time.

Just before my 24th birthday on my first day of tour I remember being greeted at Mr. Mukpo's household service entry door in the midst of a closed personal retreat by a rowdy and overly casual team of Kusung. I was surprised and somewhat disheartened by their conduct as it reminded me of locker room behavior which I loathed. Much of the 3-man team appeared to be poorly groomed and in general

looked emotionally worn. They had been serving extensively for many months and appeared to be at the end of their tether. This image really stuck with me and I will remark on why later. Prior to the end of this retreat, most were replaced by freshfaced devotees.

Within a month of starting these intensive duties we embarked on Mr. Mukpo's first ever book tour for "Turning the Mind into an Ally" visiting around 20 international locations. This was when I began to see the nature of his social engagement that anchored my allegiance further. He slept very little, was constantly teaching and interacting with students. These experiences were very inspiring for me and gave an example of my own potential to extend my capabilities further than I'd ever imagined. However, the partying continued. At some point in this early period is when my experience of service started to take a turn.

One morning Mr. Mukpo invited me to his room looking worried. He stated that he had a private task for me. He stated that he could no longer be allowed to drink more than "2 wines or 3 beers" and that I should, without question, cut his drink service off at that point. At first I felt honored that he would share such an intimate moment with me. Following this I was informed in a vague manner that something very concerning had recently happened in Chile. Until recently I had been shielded from the details of this event. Evidently his conduct was so infuriating that one of his most senior staff members had threatened to resign. I was given an official letter that basically said I was empowered by Mr. Mukpo to review and regulate all social events involving alcohol. This letter stated that I was to surpass all other authority on the course of celebrations, control alcohol consumption, and dismiss guests if

need be. Little did I know, this would be the beginning of a challenging period for me in my relationship with him… ultimately resulting in a protracted phase of decaying trust between us.

As my traveling tour continued, the nature of Mr. Mukpo's intimate relationships with female students were superficially revealed to me. I use the word superficial because I had little to no idea what occurred behind closed doors. I assumed that some had sex with him, but I did not know the nature of these acts. I learned that he had a number of longstanding girlfriends, many of whom were married. There were times on our tour where they would visit him and vice versa. Having been socialized by Shambhala starting in my teens, I was initially excited to see that my teacher was continuing his father's "crazy wisdom". Trungpa's teachings had already changed my life in a very positive way. I remember thinking how conceptually profound it was that these relationships existed. At the same time I toiled with what it must have felt like for these students, always feeling pushed to rationalize this as a generous offering to their revered teacher. One time we stayed at a couple's home, whose kid I frequently interacted with. I remember feeling such empathy, realizing that he/she was probably far more preoccupied with the nature of this relationship than I was. Maybe the child was too young, maybe caught up in other things, but part of me could not shake that maybe it was just as disturbing for the kid as it is to me now.

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Over time, many of those affairs with married women ended… and to my knowledge at least one marriage did as well. There's no way for me to know what impact, positive or negative, Mr. Mukpo's relationships with these women had on their marriage. Needless to say, to my limited knowledge, all such relationships with him had ended prior to his own marriage… some against his will. One night, just past the midpoint of my tour, I was planning a brief hiatus as things had become particularly stressful. I was sitting at a computer when I heard Mr. Mukpo come up behind me with one of these married women who had evidentially broke up with him. To my

surprise he began to massage the back of my neck with one hand. This quickly turned into an uncomfortably tight clamping static grip. At first I attempted to ignore it while continuing to appear focused on typing until I could not tolerate the pain and calmly stated “Yes Rinpoche?” He then snickered and stated to the lady “See?! He can withstand the grip!” I must admit, I had forgotten this story until very recently. Oddly I did not consider it a big deal, but after giving this man countless massages to help him relax I realized this was one of the few moments of physical contact that he initiated outside of using my arm as a banister.

Around the same time of this incident Mr. Mukpo’s drinking escalated. This resulted in one of the few times that I showed the letter in order to intervene. We were at a bar and I noticed that 3 drinks seemed like too much. As per tradition he would dictate the seating arrangement and I would find myself placed at a distance that seemed strategic on his behalf. Many times this made it difficult for me to intercept guests’ offers resulting in an experience reminiscent of the childhood game of Whack-a-Mole. Only this time the moles were drinks being handed to him, much of the time these offerings were instigated by him. I would do my best to be as inconspicuous as possible and replace them with water, as Kusung take great pride in being invisible. Many uninformed senior students would get annoyed with me and some would just ignore me regardless of mentioning the letter. However, on this very rare occasion one senior student actually listened.

During our time at the bar I observed Mr. Mukpo flirting with a student’s long-term girlfriend. I could tell that the situation was uncomfortable for him. That said, for some reason, I couldn’t get a clear read what her comfort level was. This raised further alarm as I had been told that I shouldn’t allow him to make advances on less senior or experienced students… a distant rationale that I now find very troubling.

As we were leaving the bar I did my usual escorting of Mr. Mukpo into the bathroom. I informed him that he had reached his limit and with a twinkle in his eye he indicated that he couldn’t care less. I was not invited to his car so I instructed the driver that he must proceed directly back to the residence. I rushed home to hide all

alcoholic beverages. His arrival was marked by stomps and slamming doors. I spoke with the driver to ask what had happened and was told that Mr. Mukpo had ordered him to go to another bar and was frustrated by their not having done so. Following this, my pager rang summoning me to his room. I opened his bedroom door to find darkness and quietly asked, “May I get you anything?” A sharp and booming reply: “WATER!” Upon my return I entered the pitch-black bedroom in fear. I had heard

stories of Mr. Mukpo striking other Kusung and was wary of my currently invisible distance from him while he lay in bed. Fortunately he did not hit me as I somehow managed to place the glass in the void. I left feeling somewhat relieved that a potential crisis had been averted.

The following morning I was summoned to his room and to my surprise he was awake and ready for a planned excursion. He verbalized confirmation that it was good that he didn’t drink more last night since he didn’t feel too hung-over to stick to his established schedule. As an aside, this begs mention of memories about several past events that he canceled due to hangovers. Given that positive feedback and reinforcement were rare experiences for most Kusung, I took his acknowledgement as confirmation that I was doing a good job and this encouraged me to continue serving in this way.

This event was around the time that I had completed my initial commitment of a year. Of note, during this era we were paid a modest monthly stipend of around $750 dollars for our 24/7 duties. Although this low wage was concerning to most, we felt fortunate to be able to serve in this way since Shambhala International was in a major financial crisis and running on a skeleton staff after multiple layoffs. As I understand it, Mr. Mukpo’s “support” income was priority as I hear it continues to be. This alludes to a broader topic on Mr. Mukpo and family’s relationship to money, which many find disturbing. Repeatedly I was amazed by the opulence, frequency, and duration of his luxury vacations. Long after my Continuity Kusung term I gathered that he and his wife’s toiletry/cosmetic budget rivaled my own annual

salary as a resident physician. For as long as I have known him, this standard of living has never been enough. I recall a sober midday call demanding me to push for the unfeasible purchase of an Audi A8. I vividly remember his infuriated words being: “I want my FUCKING Audi!”

Returning to my original train of thought: our meager Kusung earnings were barely sufficient to maintain our daily expenditures and I found myself depleting my 401k by the end of my tour in order keep up with his social spending. At the time, his personal accountant had instructed us that we were to avoid using his funds while going out to his numerous expensive dining events. To put it simply, I was beginning to feel that terminating my service at a year would be wise. Soon after, he requested me to renew my commitment for another year. As said in our tantric vows, “Whatever the leader commands, all that I will do.”

As I progressed through my final year of traveling there were multiple instances of Mr. Mukpo’s binge drinking that I was unable to control. All of them were marked by tense confrontations between us. One such occasion, attended by many senior staff, was at a restaurant dinner. As usual I had attempted to follow his established instructions and limit the drinking. As expected he would retract those instructions once the celebrating ensued and do everything in his power to sabotage my efforts. What made this event different was the frank verbal abuse. At one point I escorted him to the bathroom and he proceeded to verbally berate me, calling me an “asshole”

amongst other things. Upon our return to the dinner table audience, he proceeded to compose an insulting poem titled “Stupid People” which was clearly dedicated to me. On speaking with others who had witnessed this event I found that hardly anyone considered this a stellar teaching moment. In fact, his seasoned scribe later told me that the poem was immediately discarded, as it was one of his “worst” literary works. After hearing the poem I made a public reply for all to hear stating “I’m just the bullet in your own gun, shooting yourself in the foot Your Majesty.” To this he smiled and cleverly stated “Yes, but I have the bottle.”

During this dinner there was a novice female student whom it was common knowledge that I was dating. At various points Mr. Mukpo made advances towards her. As I was so preoccupied with cutting off his alcohol service, I cannot remember the specifics of those advances. All I knew was that she was uncomfortable. As per my instructions, I was to remove new students on such an occasion. So I passed my duties to my teammate and made plans to escort her elsewhere as the party continued back at our residence. When I stopped in his living room I found most of our guests standing in a circle exposed. Mr. Mukpo was marching around and ordering each of them to do various things. Evidently he had demanded that everyone get completely naked, all but one woman halted this task at underwear. Some were crying and many appeared to be nervous. At this point, I imagine senior students reading this might feel encouraged, as it is again reminiscent of his father's "crazy wisdom" behavior. When we hear accounts of such stories from that era, I think it's worth reflecting on which participants remain in our community. Of those who have left, what are their experiences? In my experience, and others who I know well, these moments did not feel all that "enlightened". In this particular instance, I heard that after my departure one guest took it upon himself/herself to dispose of all alcohol. This was after Mr. Mukpo began forcefully biting people, as he was known to do in the past. Those who likely consented to such assaults remarked to me that he had left bruises, which had been documented in photos. I vaguely recall seeing them. However, my memory is quite muddled with anxiety as I attempt to remember and much of this feels unreal as I put it onto paper.

To continue on this story, it was reported to me that Mr. Mukpo re-targeted his sexual advances to another woman. She was married with husband present and other staff noted a general feeling of discomfort. It's worth noting that he seemed to prefer to target unavailable women, usually while the significant other was present. This instance led to a redirection of Mr. Mukpo's focus on another single female who consented to entertain him and I know little of what followed.

Later that night I ruminated in frustration, sadness and anger. I could not reconcile

the helplessness I felt in trying to assist Mr. Mukpo. I felt trapped and seriously considered leaving immediately. I inquired about changing my flight, but found it to be impossible. I called one of my seniors and recounted the story while emphasizing that I intended to leave as soon as possible. He encouraged me to give it some time. As I lay in the Kusung staff bedroom I looked over at my associate who was sleeping. I realized how this teammate had become like family to me and I feared the stress he

would face without my support. Upon reflection of this moment I realize that it wasn't my devotion to Mr. Mukpo that led me to continue, but my allegiance to those who struggled to make use of these experiences. At the time I recounted a story from veteran Kusung who was violently assaulted by Chogyam Trungpa. Knocked to the ground and kicked multiple times with boots on. In that instance he considered leaving as well. His point, that echoed in my mind, was "sometimes being a Kusung is just about showing up." For those familiar with the stories of the Karma Kagyu Buddhist lineage tracing back hundreds of years, these kinds of assaults are considered brilliant moments of teaching: a complex philosophical rationale of making lemonade out of lemons. I truly believe this veteran accomplished his reframing of this assault in a way that allowed him to cope and gain further insight to Buddhist teachings. Similarly, I also wonder about other senior staff who eventually shared with me their experiences of Mipham Mukpo throwing drinks in their face or slapping them. However, I still struggled and even as I write this I feel guilt for not having the resilience to accomplish such a transmutation. At the same time I forgive myself for this and acknowledge that my socialization into this tradition is the illogical root of this guilt.

The following morning I "showed up" for my duties to find that Mr. Mukpo was amidst a major hangover. He guided me through a soup recipe passed on from his father as a hangover cure and he slept through the day with the help of pharmaceuticals. Once he regained his energy I decided it was necessary to inquire about his memories of the previous night. He indicated that he remembered little

and I proceeded to recount most of the details with focus on the biting. I do not recall telling him the details of his treatment towards me. He was remorseful and asked “Should I stop drinking?” and I stated that it was not for me to decide. Seeing him in this vulnerable state of not remembering, feeling upset, and asking for help gave me hope that he could change. I continued to serve for the following months. During the remainder of my traveling duties and beyond, I did not witness events that were as noteworthy. This is likely due to my deliberate efforts to distance myself once the bottles began to open. His drinking binges and provocative behavior did continue with a mild taper. Time and time again I would butt heads with senior staff and other Kusung about cutting off alcohol service. On most of these instances my efforts resulted in suboptimal results. Regardless, it appeared to me that his drinking was getting a little better. Similarly I noticed, at that time, that his relations to women improved as well. Many veteran Kusung would remark to me that my presence was having a positive influence on his conduct. This made me wonder how much worse things must have been before I came along.

Throughout this period, my duty to regulate his drinking was not my only task. It was also common for me to be his emissary in delivering invitations to romantic interests. This unconventional experience may be hard for others to fathom, but the reality of his role made it difficult at times to convey such communications on his own. It was not uncommon at retreat centers and in Boulder or Halifax for him to be stopped by people in devotional conversation that required his full and at times

prolonged attention. Having witnessed this I empathized with him and obliged in the awkward transaction with women. Acknowledging the power differential, I would usually emphasize to invitees that there was no pressure and that they should not feel obligated to entertain his invitation. I did not indicate that there would be negative repercussions of their saying “no.” I do not remember stating that he wished to participate in sexual activity with them. Nor did he request me to say so. However, I assume that most people knew that some form of physical intimacy

was likely the case.

Acknowledging that it is hard to tease out the affects of devotion from sexual desire, the majority of these communications were with women who seemed to express romantic interest as well. There were a couple of instances where women had declined and I did not observe direct repercussions for their decision. For those who did accept, many were led to Mr. Mukpo's abode and I know nothing of what occurred thereafter. These women were sometimes one-time guests and others would frequent for the period of weeks depending on the duration of our visit calendar. Marking yet another aspect of complexity in his being able to maintain a stable consistent relationship: our travel itinerary was quite busy. Much like a spiritual rock and roll lifestyle. Please know that these statements are in no way an excuse for an abuse of his position of power. These are simply my observations and personal rationale at the time.

After my review of Project Sunshine, I tried to recall if there were instances where I witnessed acts of frank sexual assault. I'm aware of the definition of such a thing and I admit that I have no obvious memory of such. That said, over the years I did see and hear of many women who felt disheartened, hurt and confused by their intimate experiences with Mr. Mukpo. I've seen a number of them leave the community and a few terminate communication altogether. I know of others who shared these observations and dealt with it in the same way that I did: avoidance. I feel ashamed as I read my own words, wishing that I had provided support for them. With certainty I know that their pain and confusion is vastly more severe than my own.

At this point I feel it's important to mention that over the course of the second half of my travels, Mr. Mukpo indicated that it was his wish to have more integrity in his "relationships" with women. It appeared to me that he was finally considering settling down. This was marked with the termination of most if not all of his standing relationships. He seemed determined to find some stability. Not long after my tour, I found out about his engagement with his wife. To my limited knowledge, the bulk of his known experiences with female students ended with their

engagement. Currently, I can't help but wonder about the timing of the abovementioned letter and his efforts to improve his drinking and intimate relationships. What was/were this disturbing event(s) that happened before my tour that I was shielded from?

As an aside, during my final year as a Continuity Kusung I experienced multiple other instances of what most outside of this tradition would consider psychological

abuse. To start, a Continuity Kusung receiving compliments from Mr. Mukpo was generally very rare. Conversely, he occasionally reminded me that I was unimportant without him. On a couple of occasions he made jokes about how unattractive I was and that he didn't understand how women were drawn to me. I distinctly remember him boasting that "Continuity Kusung only attract women because of me." I only share these as an example of how this preacher of kindness would treat his most devoted servants. Sure they were likely said in jest, but these words hurt me in a way that I've struggled to make use of. In this spiritual dynamic, a teacher's words carried weight and he was well aware of that. Keep in mind we were all complicit in countless flattery sessions that we felt to be our duty in order to counter his frequent episodes of obvious insecurity. It appeared he just couldn't get enough compliments.

Near the end of my travels with him, there had been conversation of my continuing for an indefinite amount of time with the title of Attaché. The mere thought of this exhausted me. Much like those previous staff members I had seen on my first day, I was nearing the end of my tether. Others noticed my burned out conduct and this was upsetting to me as I felt I was becoming a blemish on Mr. Mukpo's representation. I began to scramble to find a replacement to fill the role and finessed this agenda into Mr. Mukpo's purview. Eventually I succeeded and this eager new recruit was ready to jump in following our return from an exhausting trip to Tibet. My final moments in this capacity were bittersweet and I remember Mr. Mukpo telling me for the first and last time "I love you" just prior to heading to the airport.

For the years following I'd struggled with trying to find balance between my service to Mr. Mukpo while traversing my medical training. I took every opportunity to offer my experience to his household and beyond. All the while I felt haunted by these memories that did not coincide with what had initially inspired me to become Buddhist. I found myself coping in unhealthy manners and in unstable relationships. This led to a painful divorce involving some of the closest members of Mr. Mukpo's staff. During this time I had the chance to discuss this experience with him and he was far from sympathetic. In fact, he voiced his irritation and blame for bringing drama into his home. He followed this with an insult far too personal and complex to mention here. Again, many students of vajrayana Buddhism would consider this a form of teaching. Sadly, to this day I have not been able to make such reconciliation without dismissing my own true feelings and the feelings of others who have felt harmed. As a Buddhist I believe that feelings are devoid of any real existence while, at the same time, highly informative and not to be discarded.

Soon after my graduation from medical school I decided it best to take a distant stance from Shambhala and simply focus on my career. I was matched to residency training in New York City where I hunkered down in my work. This marked the beginning of a rocky period of healing of which I feel is nearing its end. During my residency I had extensive exposure to trauma patients. Listening to these patients and providing them with support became one of my primary avenues for understanding my past. I continued to practice meditation and also engaged in

therapy for myself. All of these, coupled with the generous and ongoing support of my friends and family, have culminated in my ability to elaborate on these experiences that I'm sharing with you now.

Since my departure from Colorado in 2014, I've had the opportunity to hear many other stories such as my own. I've seen numerous close Sakyong staff move on. As there is a trend of high staff turnover that is well known in Shambhala, I've wondered about the experiences that other, far removed, former devotees have had.

For myself, I'm still in a process of integrating my thoughts and feelings about all of this. In fact, having the opportunity to share them has been surprisingly helpful.

I feel its important to take a moment to honor those who have similarly served Mr. Mukpo who may wish to share, but for whatever reason, are unable to do so. I know of many more beyond the group endorsing this statement. The decision to release this statement was very difficult for me, for obvious reasons. Because of that, I respect those who have decided to not speak or remain anonymous. These relationship dynamics are highly complex. It takes time to process. Not to mention the proposed spiritual and social consequences of betraying your teacher and friend. Knowing all the trials and tribulations Mr. Mukpo's experienced, I still feel genuine concern for him and his family. BUT people are suffering because of his actions and it's possible that those closest to him are currently being duped by his superficial gestures of restitution, while playing the victim to those who will have it. Yes, I'm very familiar with his use of this tactic. I think it's only fair that I not propagate this idea of his role being above the ethics that apply to us all, as doing so could have tremendous painful ramifications for this community. We already have undeniable examples of how others have suffered under this spiritual model.

To conclude, I have countless thoughts around the ethical, psychological, and sociological issues that have led to this current predicament. I find I'm repeatedly saying to myself "Do not throw the baby out with the bathwater." At times who or what the "baby" is confuses me. I've veered into the narrow-sighted logic of trying to simplify this man's conduct as someone who has a problem with alcohol and women. Fortunately for me, I now have enough understanding of the human psyche to know that these issues are far more complex and malignant. Despite his voiced intention of creating a "culture of kindness", my current observation is that we are still in the midst of a culture of fear and abuse of power influenced by longstanding beliefs that need to be further called into question. For those following spiritual leaders who justify this kind of behavior, keep in mind the blinders they might wear while explaining their rationale. Much like many other religions, this particular tradition

still has generations of work to do before it fully addresses the entrenched cultural patriarchy from which it has flourished. I wish you all clarity in this process and thank you for your patience in tolerating my lengthy monologue.

15

David Ellerton

February 2019

My name is David Ellerton and I have been involved in the Shambhala Community since 1995. I have served as a Kusung in various capacities from 1999 until 2013 (when my last formal shift occurred). This service varied in terms of length and responsibility, ranging from single, daily shifts—either at various residences or events—to "campaigns," which involved week(s) or month(s) long stretches at the community's retreat centers. I also travelled as a Continuity Kusung from July 2001 until September of 2002 and served as Regional Kusung Officer from late 2006 to early 2008, the latter of which involved the scheduling, training and supervising of all aspects related to Kusung for the Rocky Mountain region. In addition to my work in the capacity as Kusung, I held other paid and unpaid positions in the community, including environment staff at one of the community's retreat centers, Resident Director of Shambhala Training, Meditation Instructor, and Coordinator of programs. I am heartbroken. I sign this letter in solidarity with those who have experienced harm in this community.

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Craig Morman

February 2019

I was participant in Shambhala from 1995 until around 2015. I served in a variety of roles throughout the years. I was the Rusung of Shambhala Mountain Center, a Sergeant in the Dorje Kasung, a meditation instructor, and the Director of Casa Werma in Mexico. I also served as a Kusung in a number of capacities from 1997-2015, including serving as Continuity Kusung from early 2002 to early 2003 approximately. I have been keeping secrets for many years, I won’t do it anymore.

There is no way that I could possibly describe the entirety of Shambhala´s culture of exploitation and abuse in a short statement. I will limit my comments primarily to my experience with the Kusung. Before proceeding I need to say that many of the worst examples of abuse and exploitation that I have witnessed and experienced happened far away from the Court and often had nothing to do with sexuality, but that is for another time.

My first experience of Shambhala was as a member of the summer staff at Shambhala Mountain Center in 1995. It was the first year that it was called RMSC, about 4 months after the “enthronement”.

I very quickly found the meditation practice to be both challenging and helpful and developed a daily practice. The next summer I joined the Kasung out of a mixture of curiosity and fear. I was accepted to the 1997 Vajryana seminary. It was there that I was invited to join the Kusung.

My exposure to the Court gradually increased for a couple of years. It started as a Kasung sitting outside of the house, or driving the car. Then mornings and afternoons serving tea and food, learning how to iron and things of that sort. Exposure to the reality of things was incremental based on how much one could handle: is he or she going to “get it”?

In late 2000 or early 2001 Mr. Mukpo invited a bunch of young men out for drinks to a bar in Boulder. He proclaimed it the first meeting of the YMBA, the Young Men´s Buddhist Association. A number of current Shambhala leaders were present that night. Some way through the evening he called me over and told me that I should continue to train as his traveling Kusung. We agreed that I would serve for a year when I graduated from Naropa, yeah I did that too.

The YMBA evening went on until well after the bars had closed. A group of us ended up in the living room of a small Boulder apartment drinking heavily. At one point Mr. Mukpo started screaming dharma questions at us and pointing, demanding an answer. His response to each answer was to scream ”WEAK VIEW!”. This was one of

my first tastes of the good stuff. The crazy stuff.

It was really fun, to be honest. I was just happy to be there as we sat in a circle around him and jumped up screaming our refuge names as he pointed to us. I talked to one participant about it a day or so later. He asked what I had thought of the night. When I naively told him that I had had a great time, he intimated that one guest in particular had found it disturbing, and that the “teaching” hadn’t been all that helpful. They are both Acharyas now. I’d be curious to hear their current views.

My tour started in Halifax. It was the first time Mr. Mukpo had stayed in the Northwest Arm house. I met him there as he was returning from India, he had lost a lot of weight on a low carb diet.

The first two weeks in the house were a cycle of party/recover/shop-to-stock-newhome/ party- repeat. There were some meetings and teaching mixed in, but that period was focused on celebrating.

It wasn’t long after starting the tour that we traveled to Chile for a teaching visit. Most of the visit was unremarkable. Near the end of the teaching cycle there was a final dinner at the home of a sangha member. This is the night that was detailed in the Buddhist Project Sunshine (BPS) reports. I will present my recollection to the best of my ability.

The dinner started off quite politely, conversation, thank you´s, and so on. As I recall, local people had taken over the bulk of the service, so I spent most of the early part of the night helping in the kitchen. At some point the serving staff were invited to come to the front. I believe it was the host who stood and opened a fairly impressive liquor cabinet. The cook and I shared a look, concerned.

The night wore on and the crazy wisdom came back out. Writing about this part of it just kind of bores me. I had only been on the road for three or four weeks and I was already getting tired of that crap. It didn’t happen all the time, but I was already wondering why it happened at all.

At some point I had had enough and checked out. I went and sat in a chair in a

nearby room, an office. I hadn't yet learned that my primary job was to protect Mr. Mukpo from himself. To this day I feel shame.

My memory of what happened next differs very slightly from what was reported by BPS. I feel it is my obligation to tell things as I remember them. It was 15 years ago, so I can only say what I remember.

I was sitting in the chair stewing. I looked up and saw Mr. Mukpo and the young woman from the report walking into what I believed to be a bedroom. Another guest closed the door behind them. That guest is currently an Acharya. My anger toward him in that moment was physical. I couldn't believe he would do that. I was just learning that it was normal.

I had met this woman earlier and I did not think she would find it appropriate. I felt that the Acharya was encouraging her to sleep with him by closing the door. I cannot say for certain what happened behind closed doors so I defer to the account given by the victim. I have no reason to doubt.

After some time, I don't remember how long, the Kasung on duty, a local woman, came and told me that she was tired, and that the host would drive us home. She forgot to give me the keys to the apartment. Over the same time span most or all of the guests left.

The woman came out of the room very upset. Somehow I wound up talking to her for a while on a balcony. She told me some of what had happened. I got the impression that Mr. Mukpo had forcefully tried to get her to have sex with him. I was not told that she had been locked-in, or that he had forced her to touch him. What she told me was bad enough, but she did not tell me that part.

I only remember pieces of the conversation, mostly of me trying to rationalize the behavior in some tantric sense while still trying to be supportive. Again, I feel shame.

The rest of the story is much as told by others. I kept his secret for 15 years. I smiled and said that I had a great time in Chile. I dodged questions and avoided people who had heard rumors about "something happening". I had passed on the information to

my superiors and just blocked the whole experience out the best I could. After a year or so the interest died down and I just kind of carried it, never speaking to anyone, and I mean anyone, about that night.

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That's how it works. We didn't even talk to each other. If we had, we would have understood just how widespread it was. We need more Kusung to talk. Then we can see what enlightened society is really built on.

Mr. Mukpo was both abusive and tender. He seemed really lonely. He shut everyone out. Sometimes he would briefly show vulnerability only to cover it up again.

After a long day in Fort Collins we went to some bars. 2 Kusung, Mr. Mukpo and one guest, a man. As the night wore on Mr. Mukpo started flirting with a local Ft. Collins woman who was not connected with Shambhala, this made me nervous. He was already very drunk. I was sober while my fellow Kusung was also drinking, he was the good cop that night.

As they sat at the bar as Mr. Mukpo slurred come-ons such as "are you a sexual person?" to the young woman. At one point she asked me if I was okay.

She asked because I was standing with my body touching Mr. Mukpo at the midline of the two of them, just looking straight forward. I needed to be close in case he did something. He kept telling the other Kusung, "tell her who I am".

After the bar closed we went back to SMC. As I drove up the mountain road, Mr. Mukpo sat with his feet out the windows and talked to my companion about how wonderful the woman from the bar was. My companion made a joke that I seconded. Mr. Mukpo lept from the back seat, screamed "who´s talking to you asshole?!" and bit me so hard that I lost clarity in my vision for a moment due to the pain. I could have killed us all. He bit me two or three times more.

As we arrived at SMC Mr. Mukpo ordered my companion to call the SMC rusung on the 2 way radio. Mr. Mukpo made him say ridiculous things. Because there are many people with those radios at SMC word got out very quickly. This upset members of the Court and, to their credit, some threatened to leave that year.

When confronted about that night by the Kusung leadership, Mr Mukpo´s response was “The Kusung need to be better trained” That is how the King receives feedback. After my tour I fell into a serious crisis that lasted around two years. Hardly anyone from Shambhala talked to me during that period. After I had dragged myself out of it I started to reappear a little bit within the community. A friend told me “we were all pretty worried about you.” No one said it when it would have mattered.

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I did Kusung shifts sporadically over the years since, but never felt comfortable getting close again. I would later turn my attention to the Kasung and land centers as I tried to maintain a connection. Those experiences are what finally drove me to leave the community.

I enabled Mr Mukpo´s abuse as he abused me. He thinks he can clear things up by writing letters. In his most recent he says “I am beginning to understand how the power dynamics between myself as a teacher and my students could cause pain and confusion in certain situations.” First of all, why would it take so long? More importantly, it seems that he has known all along that he is causing pain. He isn’t likely to change now. He does seem to want to keep getting paid.

This statement is jumbled and incomplete, it is the best presentation I could muster of the most pertinent details. I feel sadness and regret on behalf of the people who were harmed by Mr. Mukpo. I feel shame that I inspired so many others to follow him and possibly lead them into harm’s way. I feel like a fool that I could have been so deceived for so long. To be fair to all of us, it is a clever deception.

21

Laura Leslie

February 2019

I am angry.

I am angry with Shambhala. A community I came to that seemed warm and understanding and offered the promise of a healthy culture. As I moved closer and closer to the leadership and Mr. Mukpo himself, it became clear that instead a

culture of abuse and rampant sexism trickles down from Mr. Mukpo to all below him. Along the way I expressed concerns to my peers and the leadership and was dismissed, insulted or placated every time. Dismissing me as an angry, hysterical person, who doesn't see clearly, is a time-honored way to silence a woman. From much of my previous leaders and peers, I expect that I will get the same reactions now. But, I hope that some of you out there may hear this and find, reflected in my stories, truths long silenced in Shambhala.

I am also angry and devastated at many of the choices I made that lured and kept me in what I knew was an unhealthy environment. My own desire to fit in, my own ambitions to get the next pin, my own moments of feeling special or powerful- I let these dictate my choices and override my intuition and morals. As I did, I became part of the problem.

The world outside of Shambhala is waking up to the insidious nature of sexism and assault. 'Small' comments in locker rooms can lead directly to rape and worse. Leaders create cultures where everyday sexism condones rape. Shambhala likes to pretend that they are the most 'awake'- the most enlightened – but Shambhala is falling behind. With its continued defensiveness and victim blaming our 'King' in his robes becomes the worst example of hypocrisy.

Abuse occurs at every level of the mandala and Mr. Mukpo is the reference point that both implicitly and explicitly fosters it. I trace my experience of the abuse climbing to the top here. While I was never personally assaulted by Mr. Mukpo, there is no doubt in my mind that many were.

I was 20 years old when I found Shambhala in New York City. I was excited to find new friends and a safe spiritual community where I could learn and grow, so I dove in headfirst – taking all the classes and quickly becoming a volunteer for numerous hours each week.

I soon organized a large fundraising event and was honored that the President of Shambhala himself would be there. Excited to meet the President, a man in his 60's, I approached him to serve drinks and snacks. He took hold of my arm, pulled me close,

grabbed a strawberry, and while staring at my breasts, told me I was just as luscious as the fruit and how lucky were they that I was there to serve them. He stood with a male Acharya and the male leader of NYC Shambhala, all three laughed.

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The President, the 'civilian' leader of Shambhala had just turned me into a sexual object and a joke. I was humiliated. Over the years I learned from other women that he frequently used his position of power to seduce and harass them.

I was office staff in New York and helping a woman volunteer. A male colleague verbally attacked her for her gender and sexual orientation. I stepped in and told him to stop. He got in my face, pushing me back while yelling at me. The volunteer left and never returned. My boss offered to mediate between this colleague and myself. In the meeting he once again proceeded to yell at me until I was in tears. My boss deemed it a successful mediation and sent us both back to work. I was scared of him every day that we worked in that office together.

I learned later that this male colleague regularly hurt other women. His male superior deemed his actions acceptable; why would he try to be different?

On retreat, in a tiny meditation room, my much older male meditation instructor leaned forward, put both hands on my knees and whispered that there were many ways he could teach me. (AKA, wink-wink, he could teach me to fuck.) He was meant to help me with my mindfulness and instead he tried to meet his own sexual agenda. I left the room shaking. I asked for a new instructor and after being told that I was causing trouble and being annoying in this request, was given one.

He stayed at the retreat and worked with multiple other young women. I have no idea how many he may have touched against their will, but I do know he received no feedback for what he did to me.

Retreat after retreat, deeper in and with each new layer more insults. But, I was hooked so I stayed and I began to push back. I began to ask everyone how and when it would change. I asked every female Acharya and Shastri why there was such sexism. Almost as if trained in their responses, they all told me that in Vajrayana

Buddhism male and female did not exist, therefore every day sexism was empty and if I practiced more I would see this.

I was asked to be a Kusung-in-Training (KIT). I was thrilled. I was honored to be in the heart of Enlightened Society and serve Mr. Mukpo directly. On my first shift at the Court I was approached and told that I could not be a KIT. Mr. Mukpo's wife needed attendants, and her attendants (Shabchi) had to be women. I was politely told that this would be my only way to serve in the Court, but that this was true service. That by following Mr. Mukpo's wishes and serving Mrs. Mukpo it was the greatest offering I could make to him. But, I was pissed. So, I kept fighting to be a KIT.

Meanwhile, I was made Aide to the Council of the Makkyi Rabjam (CMR). The CMR determines all Kasung activities and practices, but they are also men who hold leadership in multiple other areas of Shambhala. While in a meeting, where I was silently taking notes on how to protect the Sangha, a member of the CMR told me I looked like a sexy teacher and that if he were younger he would want me to scold

him. The other men in the room laughed then went back to making policy about community protection and Dharma practice.

Turning a female subordinate into a sexual joke is not a laughing matter. All the men in the room thought it was. The joke is that a man who claims to be the ultimate protector abuses a woman under his protection.

While fighting to be a KIT, I spent hours as a Shabchi directly serving Mrs. Mukpo, helping with the children and cleaning and cleaning. The more time I spent at the Court the realization seeped in that the problems I saw in the wider community stemmed from the Court itself. In almost every moment I could observe forms of sexism and power plays. Delusional, I thought that if I were a KIT instead of a Shabchi this would be better.

I pleaded with every man I could think of to become a Kusung and was told to wait. While I was shuttled to the side all my male peers became Kusung and were much closer to Mr. Mukpo. In the Court the Shabchi were treated like they were less

valuable than the Kusung. While the male Kusung preened, stood around and did allimportant duties for Mr. Mukpo, we cleaned toilets and kept house in addition to serving Mrs. Mukpo and their children. I once asked a Kusung of the Day to help me with laundry and ironing, for the household, and I was told he could not help, as he had to be available just in case Mr. Mukpo needed tea. The general atmosphere in the Court was one soaked in ancient patriarchy.

At a party with my peers I complained to Mr. Mukpo's most senior staff person in Boulder about the problems of equality at the Court. He told me that if "you were less of a bitch and asked for things in a less angry manner", then maybe things could change. He helped set the tone for everyone at the Court and in his opinion; a calm woman with a valid opinion was a bitch. He spent countless hours with Mr. Mukpo, I imagine learning these valuable lessons.

I told the head of the Kusung that I would quit all my volunteer time at the Court if I were not made a KIT. The next day, I was invited to be a KIT as long as I continued my Shabchi shifts in equal amounts.

I did my first shift as a KIT. I was so proud to be there wearing my best suit. At the end of a 12-hour shift, feeling elated, Mr. Mukpo walked by me, patted me on the stomach and told me I was fat. His male Continuity Kusung, my peer, laughed at me. I have rarely felt more humiliated.

In that moment something inside me died – my fight and my anger. Now, all I felt was sadness. Now I knew for sure that Mr. Mukpo did indeed set the tone. I had tried to blame it on his wife. I had tried to blame it on the men surrounding him. But, ultimately as the 'King' he sets the precedent.

I had had enough. I felt like no matter how much I fought it would never change. That the sexism was so ingrained it would not move. Part of it was a larger sense of depression in how community members treat each other. Shambhala, as far as I could tell, was not in any way a culture of kindness. All the energy, effort and certainly money, went to the Mukpos, while community members were neglected.

The constant pressure, the games between peers and the lack of honesty made me see that each person had to change, beginning with Mr. Mukpo.

And, I became disgusted with myself and ashamed that the wool had been pulled over my eyes – that I too had silenced people and put position over care of others. That women had told me of their hurts and that I had placated. I had become part of the machinery of normalizing abuse, slowly growing blinder to all the 'isms' playing out. Doing so, I hurt people, and for this I am sorry.

I left the Shambhala community in 2016 because Mr. Mukpo was abusive and I no longer thought that the community could change. Most of the men surrounding him knew it. Most of the men in leadership roles were either abusers themselves or witnessed it and silently endorsed it. I left because I knew unless something radical happened it would never change.

Then, something radical did happen and it still is not changing. When the Wickwire Holm Report was released, in the next paragraph the Interim Board asked for money. They always ask for money, but the accusations against Mr. Mukpo of clergy sexual misconduct and an abuse of power had just been confirmed. I was deeply offended that the immediate concern was not the victims but the financial health of Shambhala and Mr. Mukpo himself. How about instead a fund to help victims heal? I then received an email to all Kusung asking me to practice for Mr. Mukpo's long life. No mention of people being harmed by him – just long life for the abuser. When Mr. Mukpo apologized, there was no real claim of culpability or true remorse. As far as I can see it's business as usual: The victims will be placated, then pushed out, then silenced or discredited and the 'King' will shine hypocrisy from the throne.

While some men in power have made symbolic retirements, much of the leadership has not changed. These men are still internal leaders and they are still Mr. Mukpo's enablers, now it's behind a curtain. These are the men who laugh at harassment and allow a culture of rape to flourish.

My experiences are the tip of the iceberg. There is no such thing as 'small' abuse. There has to be an entire overhaul of how people treat each other. Change has to

happen from all sides and by all members and in this insulated, abusive hierarchy it has to happen from the top as well. As long as people keep funding and supporting this power structure, there is no true motivation to change.

We all made oaths of loyalty and secrecy and Mr. Mukpo broke those oaths when he abused his power. I hope that the community can confront him and themselves directly and that the foundations of his throne crumble so true healing can emerge.

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Allya F. Canepa

February 2019

"As it has been said: The lion's corpse will not be eaten by other wild animals; rather it will be consumed by worms from within."

~ Dorje Dradul of Mukpo, The Court Vision & Practice, Chapter 10 - Corruption

I have many stories and much to share but I am afraid to say too much. So I thought it would be best to start with myself.

Although I had lived only 7 miles from Karmê Chöling in Vermont since 1984, and attended Trungpa's cremation at the invitation of a childhood friend, I did not enter Shambhala until 1992 when I came to help with marketing. I had been "discovered" as a possible liaison to the local community. Vermonters are standoff-ish at best and Karmê Chöling was viewed as a source of great entertainment. So I understood the problem Shambhala faced.

My colleague, and one of my first Shambhala friends, was Mr. Mukpo's then current "girlfriend". I remember how I perceived their relationship, noted it several times, and commented on it at least once. I attended Pema Chodron's famous "When Things Fall Apart" dathun, a month long meditation practice program at Karmê Chöling in 1993, finished the Sacred Path of Warriorship and other requisite studies in time to partake of Mr. Mukpo's 2nd 3-month seminary, one of the last long summer programs to be held at Shambhala Mountain, the summer of 1994.

I was an instantaneous true believer.

That fall I was invited to do my first KIT (Kusung-in-training) shift. One afternoon I

was handed a bottle of lotion and was told that Mr. Mukpo wanted his feet and legs massaged. Easy enough. I went into his room where he sat in his wing-backed chair. I'm quite sure he wore only his bathrobe as it was easy to massage his feet and lower legs. I doubt that he had anything else on. I don't remember exactly what he asked me, something along the lines of, "what do you think of my feet?" What I do remember clearly is looking up at him and asking, "is that vanity, sir?" and he said, "Yes, I'm afraid it is." After I left the room, his travelling Kusung said, "ah, the scent of the lineage". I still remember the smell of the pear lotion he used for years. I was disappointed when he changed brands. I no longer knew what the lineage smelled like.

I saw so many versions of that scene throughout my 25 years in Mr. Mukpo's entourage. I am hard-pressed to count them. This flash of beginning devotion, the way he used his personal power, a foreshadowing of his downfall.

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Over the years I have often thought about what I might write. At one point I briefly aspired to be the Kalapa Court historian. Even now it is much too big of a story to unveil alone and clearly too terrifying for me personally. I sob, shake, something like a muffled scream wants to come out. Or I simply freeze. I am told that is the nature of trauma. Although I have been actively engaged in trauma resolution and integration (psychiatry, psychotherapy, AA and Al-Anon, bodywork, creative group therapy etc.) for 2.5 years, when I hear the word trauma, I still believe that must be about someone else. In a way, I suppose it's both.

Recently I woke up from a dream where I'm standing in a field of dead bodies. The "forgotten warriors of Shambhala" is how we refer to them in our liturgy. The unknown victims of abuse within the confines of an eroding fortress is how I see them. The many of us that gave our whole selves in service of a vision that we believed was good, and who are now devastated to feel that our gift was hardly appreciated. A sad realization compounded by the sensation that "we" are the ones who helped transform this ordinary person into an insatiable king.

It is impossible for me to summarize my 25 years of experience and observation in a short document. If the community wants to know more, then more will come from all of us. Based on my accumulated memories and perceptions, I can say that I unconditionally support the survivors and those who have tried to bring forth stories that run contrary to the public face presented by Shambhala and our wouldbe king. We might not always get our facts straight, it might come out crazy and jumbled, but we, the survivors, are onto something, whatever we as individuals would like to call it. I personally like to think that I am witnessing the death of patriarchal rule altogether.

At 36 I had convinced myself that I was out of harm's reach because I managed to steer mostly clear of malignant personalities who seem to enjoy bad sex and late night drinking. Because both sides of my family had normalized and codified sexual, physical, and substance abuse for generations, I was an expert at reading between the lines. The context, the allowing blind eye, the inter-generational grooming, the abuse – it was all there. I came to Shambhala pre-groomed to see my brilliance as a gift for other and to fall into a kind of blank self-less persona when asked to serve. The only thing I was pretty clear about is that I thought alcohol was a problem. And I thought sex was a problem.

The next thing I knew I had sold my beloved home in northern Vermont and was working as a groom for Lady Diana's Windhorse Dressage Academy in Rhode Island. I can't remember why I ever thought that was a good idea. I had everything in Vermont that I wanted to enjoy a rich productive creative life. And then I sold it.

I found it impossible to understand, except when forced to look, why I increasingly felt, and at times acted, like a feral, cornered animal. I was "handled" over and over during the course of my 25 years of service because I was perceived as both

compliant and dangerous, both a jewel and a threat. When I was good, I received treats. When I was bad, I was punished.

I didn't exactly behave submissively. I asked too many questions. I might have on

occasion even growled. To the credit of the courtiers' twisted intelligence, I did "save the kingdom" in several instances. A natural born fixer, I don't know how to not go in and just start fixing broken things. Gifted with a robust constitution, no matter how bad it got, how tired or used I felt, I couldn't be broken. I kept coming back.

When they invited me to be the Dragon Region Kusung Commander, I asked, "Why now, why after 25 years am I being given a command post?" I was told, "you're the right person for this time". When I asked, "and what time is that?" I received back what I characterized as nervous laughter. That was in the fall of 2017. When the allegations hit our screens, I was in the Canyonlands with my brother and his daughters. In reading the Buddhist Sunshine Reports I came to realize that I could identify every woman from their stories except one. When I returned home I resigned my post. I had heard about the Chile incident over a decade ago. I have heard faint murmurings about other possible rape scenarios. In the distance I noted hushed voices intent on making the stories go away.

I had my own experiences. I kept remembering a quiet night at Prajna. Perhaps the program had the evening off, or there was a banquet for participants only. I remember sitting around the Prajna staff campfire chatting with 3 or 4 other Kasung. I remember the identity of the Kusung on-duty. I believe I was Camp Commander because that would be the only reason Mr. Mukpo would invite me to his bedroom. He liked to receive summary reports about what people were up to. Nonetheless I was surprised as he and I were not in the habit of meeting this way. Being a Kusung I went immediately to kneel at his side of the bed and waited for his question or command. I was surprised when instead he put his hand down my shirt and fondled my breasts and said, "please I just want to sleep," firmly directing my head to his cock. I obliged and shook it off. I buried and minimized my own experiences for over 20 years.

Mostly I didn't tell anyone. Or I curtly summarized my experience as having been blessed enough to receive a "quarter cup of bindus" from my guru. I don't know

why I described it that way. It was the best I could do as my mind scrambled to relieve pressure from the melodic dissonance. In the Vajrayana we are taught that all body fluids, or pieces of clothing, tufts of hair, or leftover food from the guru's plate are blessings gifted directly from the body of enlightenment. In the end, although I used those words to keep me from imploding, I was never able to discard my basic sense that this man had no idea, nor did he seem to care to have an idea, about how to create a shared space for intimacy. At least not with me. In short, I thought to myself, "well, he's not a very good lover, I won't do that again."

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It was late when I stepped over the body of the sleeping on-duty Kusung who, if he was awake, didn't peep. The next morning I asked him, "so you didn't do a final check? To see if Mr. Mukpo or I needed water?" He replied, "No, in those circumstances, I don't go back in." Those circumstances. As a Kusung during Mr. Mukpo's bachelor days I would go in to make sure the female guest had water. Regardless of whatever else was going on, I felt it was common courtesy to offer water. A strange fog of not wanting to experience or witness my own life settled into my being. Periodically I would find someone willing to chat about the bizarre fairytale we were co-creating.

I finally said, "enough".

Shambhala has been the entirety of my adult life. My so-called productive years. The years during which I should have built a career and developed lifelong friendships, the fruits of which I would be enjoying now. I've held almost every service post available in Shambhala. I accomplished the highest practices available to me. If I still believed in formal practice, I would be preparing for Scorpion Seal 6 and mixing in sessions of the revered Six Yogas of Naropa practices. I went on long retreats. Sometimes I was in. Sometimes I was out. Always I was in relationship to a phenomenon that I was both attracted to and repulsed by. I had friends as long as I was good. They disappeared when I was "bad". Occasionally I was not allowed to serve. I was afraid of what I might see. At the same time I had a clear sense that the

king and his courtiers were equally afraid of what I might see. Various powerful men at various times took me on as a challenge to see if they could put me under their thumb. I was often punished for my good deeds.

At the end of my time serving as “privy purse” or the king’s personal finance manager (2006-2010), in what I can only describe as an act of cruelty, Mr. Mukpo sent one of the few people he knew I would listen to as the messenger to dispose of me. I vehemently disagreed with the choices that were being made. I did not trust either of the financiers who had sidled up to the king, feeding his grandiose magical thinking, buying his favor with flattery. I had learned what Mr. Mukpo had wanted his “privy purse” to learn – how to model the finance structure to be as lucrative as the ancient system still practiced in currently existing monasteries. I had run a successful beta-test and raised enough money to pay for the better part of the Rinchen Terdzo, the first major retreat held in Orissa. I had created a system designed to help travelling household staff track the money flow. As I rode the crest from bachelor days to the era of our married king, I worked 24/7 to keep up with his activity. I went above the call of duty to protect Mr. Mukpo from being associated with a dubious financier. And then I was summarily dismissed.

A short time later I was asked to meet with five of Mr. Mukpo’s closest advisors, all male. I was very uncomfortable. That feeling of being a caged animal. But I also thought it was humorous – that it took 5 men to … do what I don’t know. They really wanted me to continue doing the work. I declined. I liked working alone without a boss. I certainly wasn’t going to trade that in order to work for a middle manager

that seemed both arrogant and dishonest, glib. To add insult to injury, I was offhandedly accused of stealing from the king. I was delirious with paranoia, anger, and exhaustion. I was in a fury for months. After all I had done?

I managed to stay away for two years, but my trauma had not resolved and my relationship with Shambhala was not yet over. In 2012 I took on the most grueling fix-it job to-date, saving Ashoka Credit Union. My work as CEO ended in a similar

way. After having successfully beached the credit union onto dry ground, I was squeezed out of my job by having to take considerably less pay than I was originally contracted for. I was thanked profusely when I chose to resign, but I was left at 58 with no income, no retirement, and very little savings.

Those two incidents forced me to acknowledge the institutionalized abuse of people working for the good of Shambhala.

Against my better judgment I returned to Chile in February 2018 as a Campaign Kusung, only to watch our would-be king on the throne we built look the pretty Chilean women up and down, assessing a desirable object within his grasp, overheard my fellow Kusung say things like, “if he does anything inappropriate, her husband will kill him,” watched as Mr. Mukpo asked for one after another of his loyal servants to be flown in on expensive last minute flights as a barricade for what might bubble up and need to be dealt with, watched as we scrambled at great expense to get him moved out of reach of the program and into a local AirBnB. I surmised that we went to these extreme measures so that he could drink without being seen and not blow his cover as an all-powerful guru. One of the excuses we used was that there were too many ants in his bathroom. I did not want to go to the traditional end-of-program Court staff dinner with him. When asked why, I said because I do not want to watch my guru and king get drunk. Again. I was asked to then please come to support the rest of us. On packing day, I looked in the mirror and said to myself, “this is your last campaign.” I was so relieved. I was starting to leave.

When the allegations became headline news, I heard that Mr. Mukpo asked how I was doing. My fury reignited. I told my superior that if Mr. Mukpo wants to know how I’m doing, then he is welcome to call me after he has successfully undergone rehab for both alcohol abuse and sexual predation and has accumulated a few years of sobriety and therapy under his belt. I have no idea if the message was brought to him. At the time Kusung were being asked to tell stories of their Kusung days and were being encouraged to write letters with any thoughts or questions they might

have. I feel certain that this was intended as a way of gauging loyalty.

I was even asked if I would be interested in being in charge of the Mukpos' financial world, as if getting my old job back could be anything other than an opportunistic dump and run. The inner circle was starting to panic. I actually mulled it over for a few days. In the end I was unable to conceive of how much I would be willing to accept in salary. No amount of money could have brought me back into the fold,

especially since I was unlikely to be paid much for long, even if I did manage to save the kingdom one more time. I couldn't fathom that it was even possible anymore. And my body refused.

In the end my question is about what I want to be loyal to. What I am not interested in being loyal to is an immature boy-king with substance abuse issues who walks away from every harm he has caused, cowering behind his wife's traditional skirts, and stepping on the backs of soon-to-be physically fit and mentally unprepared mostly young male Kusung who are trained to not see and to not tell. I have watched almost every Continuity Kusung come through, most of them remaining evangelical despite the near constant abuse of their person. Granted, the abuse was not always immediately noticeable. However, in my view there was always some combination of treating his Kusung as special, or as one of the chosen ones, at the same time toying with a weakness, igniting competition and insecurity, all while stealing their brilliance for his own.

Nor am I interested in hearing the mantra of goodness and kindness being used to lull me into an altogether too familiar stupor. There is no goodness or kindness available here without accountability and justice. None. Unfortunately myself and my few real friends are watching the current debacle shaking our heads, saddened by the feeling that there may well always be new acolytes willing to offer everything they have to the inevitable point of exhaustion, only to be discarded and added to the heap of corpses.

I am 60 years old. There is only one fix-it left and that is me. I have very little idea

about where to even begin. I have spent my life trying to care for other, as instructed by my family and my guru. I watched hundreds of women go in and out of Mr. Mukpo's bedroom. I held the hands of many. Rocked with them when they sobbed. Stayed with them when they just didn't know what happened. Tried to warn them about what it feels like to be queen for a day. I saw one too many debauched nights and nursed one too many of the king's hangovers. I feared for the women. I was disgusted by what I saw. And yet I stayed. I watched helplessly as donations were spent like tossed candy. Meanwhile I'm wondering if I'll be able to keep what little I have left.

I experienced one too many acts of cruelty including being verbally eviscerated by Mr. Mukpo's closest confidant, his most powerful minister and life-long mentor, the original and most feared Kusung, who in a drunken rage questioned my loyalty. A fellow Kusung hoped to shrug it off by saying, "you know how he gets." I was on duty. I went back upstairs to the party. I was humiliated. I never even once considered reporting anything. Everyone seemed to be walking around like zombies in various degrees of collusion and denial.

Despite the proclamation that I am my only remaining fix-it, I do have one weird and ridiculous task left and that is to figure out what I can do to help Mr. Mukpo's feisty, aging, disabled mother and her family who will have no place to live when Marpa

House is sold. For my sake, I wish I could leave her in the dust. But I can't. I've been holding her finances together for over 15 years. Lady Konchok is akin to the ultimate survivor in this world that was created out of nothing. Instead of selling both Courts and volunteering to put money back into the Shambhala coffers, or at least stop the flow out, Mr. Mukpo has approved selling a property that is home to 30 people and his very own family. Meanwhile, the Boulder and Halifax residences sit empty. I even heard that Mr. Mukpo is in the process of buying another property. Cognitive dissonance.

I do not believe he feels genuine remorse. I believe that he will say what he feels he

must in order to keep the money flowing in. I do not believe that he has genuine concern for whether or not Shambhala crumbles. The young man, the one I once knew and felt love for, had been further perverted by the very thing we all thought was good and true. If he merely suffered from bad judgment and poor taste, I would enjoy seeing his sweaty face as he hauls his own damn suitcases onto the tarmac of his next job. But the protective circle has closed in around him. His wealthy patrons will continue to fill his wallet. They will protect him from his own wake-up call. They will protect him from us, the ones who are willing to name the disease. They will have their own private source of platitudes to help lull their insight. I no longer envy them even as I wonder how I will find my way in this chaotic, overly bright world outside the fortress.

I wake up everyday, despite all my support systems, weary and broken. Despite my perceived intelligence and my broad-spectrum skill sets, I cannot fathom going to work. I spend days at a time never getting out of my pajamas. I am not yet able to trust people except on occasion, even ones who clearly love me. Yes, I came in with my own history of family trauma making it easy for me to fall in as prey. In no way is it ever okay for any human, or any human society, to use someone's plea for freedom and spiritual awakening as a basis for systemic manipulation across power differentials which indulge cruel, debasing interpersonal relations. And then call it devotion. And use and use and use until it's all used up.

And yet here we are. I truly believe that we've all seen or heard something. I believe we all have questions. What remains is for us to put the puzzle together, attending to the details of our own story and finding our own voice. I believe the story is important. But only because, without it, I would be left standing in the dark with my mouth open making no sound.

Therefore corruption is a dangerous disease, one that should be diagnosed and destroyed as soon as any symptom of it occurs in the Kingdom.

~ Dorje Dradul of Mukpo, The Court Vision & Practice, Chapter 10 – Corruption.

Louis Fitch

February 2019

Culture of Sexism

One of my first Kusung-in-Training (KIT) shifts was at Prajna at SMC. I was being trained by a more senior female KIT in how to serve tea properly - what exactly Mr. Mukpo currently liked. Mr. Mukpo had wandered past us and down into the kitchen to hang out with some of the people there. At one point I heard laughter and turned around to see Mr. Mukpo ogling the KIT mentor's butt while the other men laughed and stared along with him. The young woman turned around and saw them staring and smiling, turned slightly red, then went back to showing me how many seconds to brew the exact color Mr. Mukpo's tea must be. Of the 4 men in that kitchen, 3 held leadership positions and have only risen since then. People may find this confusing as this is just typical behavior in this world. Even if I thought that justified it, we have no place claiming to be a community based around mindfulness if we are that ignorant.

I said nothing then. I rose through the ranks and continued to say and do nothing to meaningfully effect change. And sometimes I'd even laugh along myself, to feel a part of something. This was particularly true when I was in groups with Mr. Mukpo and being part of such blatant objectification filled my desire to be part of his inner circle. In those moments this was more important to me than the fact I found the objectification horrible. The majority of Shambhala has not and will not see this side of Mr. Mukpo as it is only with his inner crew where he felt he could drop the PC Rinpoche thing and indulge his abuse tactics.

The KIT was a person coming to offer her heartfelt service out of her spiritual devotion and was reduced to her ass. And we all condoned that. And I know the people who laughed along with him there might be horrified and angry that I would say this as they are one of the good guys. They aren't rapists. They have never had Care and Conduct investigations about their behavior. They have tried to listen to the complaints of women and other minorities in the community. And yet, we said

nothing to change the nature of the complaints we heard. We laughed along. And now we're mostly silent when it has been made clear that Mr. Mukpo has a distinct pattern of sexual harassment and abuse. We are his closest students and we say nothing. He was born into this community and has been surrounded with this structure his whole life. Those of us who are the closest in for the most part have only laughed along. How would he know any different if we don't confront him? How would we know any different if he doesn't confront us?

And I've heard from some other Kusung and leaders that they have actually given him feedback. They continue to be publically silent in the face of victims coming forward. They continue to hold their posts.

Mr. Mukpo often cycles through people who start to give him feedback. And he is incredibly skilled at bringing in those who purely conform to his view of the world, which is part of how I have seen Kusung move towards an increasingly sexist and insular boy's club. And he can ghost those who start to give too much feedback and cycle in someone who will feel blessed to come in. Then after a few months, he'll bring the other person back in before they walk away. He plays games of who is close in order to keep feedback at a distance.

I am not saying that it isn't hard to speak up. But we don't get to pretend to be good guardians of our community's wellbeing if we don't treat these moments with the severity they deserve.

I look back on that moment and I know that I am in part to blame for the harms he has caused. I wasn't there for the abuses described in the Project Sunshine and Wickwire Holm reports but I know that every time I said nothing, I played my part. And for that, I am deeply sorry.

Money and Vanity

During one Kusung shift Mr. Mukpo was performing a set of practices to help those in the community who were sick. I went to his bedroom with the Continuity Kusung to wake Mr. Mukpo up and take his breakfast request. We kneeled on the floor while

the Continuity Kusung went through the schedule saying that Lama Pegyal and Lama Gyurme Dorje – Mr. Mukpo's stepfather and half-brother – would be a little late as they were still finishing the tormas and various ceremonial preparations. After being briefed on the schedule he asked who would be coming and who the primary funder of the ceremony was. After being told how much the larger donors were giving, he smiled and gave a happy grunt (interpreting grunts is key to Kusungship).

Somewhere in that day, I remember cleaning up his bathroom and wiping down all of the various face products and cosmetic creams, and wondering at just how much of that money from these students was put into these various expensive creams. And it struck me just how vain Mr. Mukpo is and how many different ways that comes across.

I mentioned this to a senior Kusung who laughed and agreed that it was excessive. But said that it was how these students sitting downstairs could connect to him and so it was how he brought them into his practice for their benefit. The more I've thought about that, the more it seems like trickle-down economics. Perhaps the premise of Shambhala is trickle-down enlightenment.

I know people have said that this is not a true reflection of how the finances around Mr. Mukpo work. But excessive spending clearly designed to sooth his insecurity happens and many of us know it. The breaking point was being told this was

absolutely secret as people "wouldn't understand." I couldn't accept that I was helping facilitate the use of people's heartfelt gifts to salve Mr. Mukpo's insecurity and vanity.

Culture of Silence

Why haven't more of those of us who know Mr. Mukpo and the inner workings of the Court-trained leadership come forward?

I think you have to really buy in to the whole thing. Not everyone was born into this worldview, but I think the pattern is often similar. For those being brought in there

is a process of indoctrination during which Kusung are trained to drop their own common sense and conform to the boys' club atmosphere. As each seasoned Kusung trains the new excited devotees it is easier to shelve jaded views and leave things sparkly. Kusung are groomed to turn a blind eye. And, then the Kusung most conditioned to not confront Mr. Mukpo and hold to bro-code rise through the ranks until they permeate leadership in Shambhala.

For those born into the community we are indoctrinated from birth. My parents were Shambhala Buddhists. I am what is colloquially called a 'dharma brat.' I was raised knowing that Trungpa, Mr. Mukpo's father, was the embodiment of all things wonderful and powerful. Those weren't always the terms used, but that was the point. I know that I was unique and special because I had the good fortune to be born near Trungpa and to meet him as a baby. I am one of the chosen warriors of Shambhala here in this dark age to bring about Enlightened Society. Again, not always those words, but that was what was being communicated.

For most of my life, when there's a moment someone might call on a higher power – watching your car crash or some equal scare – it is not some god or deity that comes to mind, it is Trungpa.

And all of the insane things that happened in Trungpa's days: all the abuses, molestation, drugs, alcohol, mayhem – those were either crazy wisdom or simply the hippy days. But the hippy days are long gone and the crazy wisdom argument is still used. And it's a brilliant tactic – if something feels or is really fucked up, that's only because you don't really understand that it's there to "wake you up."

By acknowledging the massive harm perpetrated by these monarchs, I have to face the prospect that everything I have ever known or thought about myself and the world is wrong. And if I accept that as true, I may lose my family and every person I grew up with.

All of this is a very powerful impetus to not examine too closely the underpinnings of this sangha.

Keep in mind, this is how Mr. Mukpo was raised as well. And while many of the 'dharma brats' feel like they are probably some version of a tulku, he has been identified as one and placed on a throne. Introspection for him means a far costlier fall from grace. And with his writing books and expanding on the Scorpion Seal, he has built an impressive suit of armor where he has no reason to think any of us are equal to him as he is The Earth Protector. Until it becomes convenient for him to be represented as human, as he did in his latest letter, so he can get out of taking responsibility for the harm he causes. He cannot choose when he wants to be Rinpoche and when he wants to be human with human foibles. If he wants to be treated as the top of the hierarchy he must act accordingly.

Though I have held many roles and have tried to address many of the cultural issues I felt were harmful, I don't think I made any meaningful difference. For me, after a point of realizing that I wasn't changing things it seemed to me that I was actually just enabling the cycle to continue.

I know some of my peers and leaders feel they want to repair and make it all better. I certainly felt that way for many years.

But I look at my pretty uniform and my shiny pins and all I can see is a group of Shambhala Warriors ogling women. And I know that the sexual assault and abuses perpetrated in this community – scars that will never leave – is because people, including myself, didn't say anything.