The main point of my undertaking in this book is to show that enough is enough. The survivors I have met with are articulate, intelligent, thoughtful, and insightful. I promised that their words would be shared with the reader in as unfiltered a manner as they spoke with me. Jamie Dantzscher asked Larry Nassar, “How fucking dare you say you are sorry?” I see no reason to filter the language, to tone down the anger, to “clean up” the vocabulary. It would be disrespectful to do so and would deny the reader the opportunity to appreciate just how deeply the survivors have been hurt and how truly angry they are.

These emotions are directed at both enabler and predator, sometimes with greater intensity at the former. I had not expected that. It was only while watching the victim impact statements that I began to understand the extent to which the survivors blamed the enablers for their plight. As I interacted with them, that anger was repeatedly reinforced, expressed directly, and often mixed with sadness. In one of the most painful interactions, one of the survivors came to the realization that a revered and much-loved coach was nothing more than an enabler. For her, it was excruciating. And it impressed upon me the power of the enabler.

1. While writing the book, I met with a psychologist whose practice focuses on survivors of sexual assault. He was not surprised to learn of the direct language in which my interviewees expressed their emotions. Indeed, he encouraged me to understand that it can be therapeutic, for it enables survivors to “release” their anger.
I was fortunate in being able to spend considerable time with these badly injured survivors, and thus to begin to truly understand the costs they had incurred as a consequence of their enablers’ decisions. The emotions they expressed cover the gamut. In many cases, the painful road to recovery will last a lifetime; some survivors doubt whether they will ever lead normal, healthy lives. Some survivors are currently in an abusive personal relationship, sometimes one in a series of abusive relationships, unable to break the cycle. Some survivors have strained relations with their parents; whether because the parents feel they did not sufficiently protect their children is an open question. For some, going public with their stories has strained their marriages, and their experiences have affected their relationships with their own children. Survivors of abuse by priests have, in some cases, developed great anger against the church.

I am not the emissary for the survivors; for that, they do not need me. I have no interest in recounting what sexual predators did to them. Indeed, I believe they were relieved when they learned that was not my focus. In approaching the survivors whom I interviewed for this book, I made it clear that while I am deeply sympathetic to the terrible pain caused by their perpetrator, my primary interest was the person who enabled the perpetrator. There is no doubt regarding the depravity of a sexual predator, but the enabler is only half a step behind.

Although the enablers hid behind various cloaks, many of their survivors today call them out by name. This book joins in that effort. In making the decision to name names, my intention is clear: to ensure that the reader understands how institutionalized the culture of assault was and how deeply invested enablers were with their institutions. Their allegiance was clear; their identification was absolute.

Court documents filed on behalf of survivors make clear the overwhelming odds they faced. The enablers literally overwhelmed them. Not only were there a seemingly endless number of enablers, but their status at the relevant institutions enabled them to clear the path for the predator and give the survivor not a chance. Until now.

Whether the enablers feel shame and embarrassment is unclear, safe to assume they have convinced themselves they either did not know or were not in a position to do anything. In listening to and reading their comments, there were times I wanted to shout, “Stop, just stop!” for no
statements, however artfully drafted by lawyers or crisis management experts, can explain or excuse their actions. They are nothing more than empty words intended to sway the court of public opinion. I would be remiss were I not to single out USA Gymnastics as the absolute “master” of empty ad hominems,\(^3\) but the other institutions discussed here follow close behind.

In spite of persistent best efforts to dodge, bob, and weave, none of the enablers has Muhammed Ali’s ability to forever “float like a butterfly,” though some have clearly stung the survivors “like a bee.” Larry Nassar’s former dean, Dr. William Strampel, was convicted in a court of law for “misconduct in office and willful neglect of duty.”\(^4\) Former Michigan State University president Lou Anna Simon is on trial, as is former MSU gymnastics coach Kathy Klages. Others must join them as defendants, not only individuals but also the institutions behind them. Their actions clearly warrant prosecution. It is my hope this book will facilitate the bringing of these enablers to justice.

The report of the Independent Investigation, “The Constellation of Factors Underlying Larry Nassar’s Abuse of Athletes,” was submitted on December 10, 2018, by the law firm Ropes and Gray. Written by Joan McPhee and James P. Dowden, it addresses both USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University. Of USAG, the report stated:

The institutional failures, however, extended beyond weak structural elements, governance deficiencies and failures of oversight. In the summer of 2015, when the National Team member allegations of sexual assault were squarely presented to USAG and the USOC [United States Olympic Committee], the two organizations, at the direction of their respective CEO’s, engaged in affirmative efforts to protect and preserve their institutional interests—even as Nassar retired from the sport with his reputation intact and continued to have access to girls and young women at the college, club and high school levels. The actions of these organizations, their CEO’s and other senior personnel reveal that, apart from USAG’s referral

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to law enforcement in the summer of 2015 and again in the spring of 2016, USAG and the USOC took no meaningful steps to protect athletes from the danger presented by Nassar. Rather, these organizations, each in their own way, maintained secrecy regarding the Nassar allegations and focused on controlling the flow of information about his alleged misconduct.5

I Skyped with a Michigan State survivor, “JD1,” on March 20, 2019. In the course of our conversation, she pinpointed the distinction between the bystander and the enabler from the survivor’s perspective: the bystander saw and chose not to mitigate immediate or present harm, the enabler was told and chose not to do so. An enabler is not a bystander, but a bystander who chooses not to act becomes an enabler. JD1 knew who Nassar’s enablers were, but no bystander directly witnessed Nassar abusing JD1.

Like many other survivors, JD1’s anger is directed primarily at the enablers who protected the institution, rather than at the perpetrator. As survivors consistently emphasized, enablers were adults in positions of authority. Unlike the bystander, who in the overwhelming majority of cases is randomly at the scene, the enabler, although not present, has the ability to make important decisions regarding the perpetrator based on information received, directly or indirectly. The enablers at whom JD1 pointed an accusatory finger were Michigan State University officials—trainers, coaches, senior administrators, including former president Lou Anna Simon—who made the deliberate decision to protect the “brand” rather than protect the victim. In the eyes of JD1 and the other survivors, the enabler repeatedly had the opportunity to act but chose not to do so.

JD1 was raised a Spartan and loved Michigan State University. Nevertheless, when asked how she currently felt about the university, her response was direct: “Burn the fucking place down.” This blunt expression of the sense of betrayal was reiterated by other survivors in relation to individual enablers and institutions alike.

The “Status of the Independent Special Counsel’s Investigation into Michigan State University’s Handling of the Larry Nassar Matter” was

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enough

submitted on December 21, 2018, by William Forsyth, independent special counsel. Of MSU, Forsyth wrote:

Amid the multitude of stirring accounts of how MSU’s premier sports medicine doctor sexually abused scores of young women, the MSU Board of Trustees sent a written request to the Attorney General [of the State of Michigan], asking him to investigate “MSU’s handling of the Nassar situation.” The Board pledged that it “stood ready to fully cooperate with (the Attorney General Office’s) review.”

Unfortunately, the University failed to live up to this pledge by: (1) issuing misleading public statements, (2) drowning investigators in irrelevant documents, (3) waging needless battles over pertinent documents, and (4) asserting attorney-client privilege even when it did not apply. These actions warrant extended discussion because they highlight a common thread we encountered throughout the investigation into how the University handled allegations against Nassar. Both then and now, MSU has fostered a culture of indifference toward sexual assault, motivated by its desire to protect its reputation.\(^6\)

Forsyth’s assessment is echoed by the survivors. In her victim impact statement, Olivia Cowan, a former gymnast, was forceful in addressing USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University. “I now view green and white in the same way I view Larry Nassar,” she said. Acknowledging that MSU had apologized for Nassar’s action, she noted that MSU officials needed to “look in the mirror and take ownership.”

“Where were you when we needed you?” Cowan asked. “If you had only believed the women who brought complaints forward.”\(^7\)

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\(^6\) Forsyth, p. 2.