

PURE GENIUS

TO FIGHT SEXUAL ABUSE, WRESTLER MICK FOLEY LEARNS THE COMPUTER



BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

POSTING IN **ENERGY**

COMPUTER ILLITERATE AND PAY PHONE SAVVY UNTIL RECENTLY, FOLEY USES TECH FOR SOME OF HIS LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT WORK.

<http://i.bnet.com/blogs/mickfoley.jpg> **Mick Foley** (otherwise known as Mankind or Cactus Jack) is best known in the wrestling ring. But now he's taking on a new, unlikely opponent: sexual abuse. In the last few weeks, Foley completed training as an online hotline volunteer for the Washington-based **Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network** (<http://www.rainn.org/>), or RAINN.

Recently, RAINN partnered with several technology and security firms to build a safe and secure online hotline for victims of sexual assault and their families. (The phone hotline has helped more than one million callers since its inception in 1994.) While the web-based hotline is as simple as instant messaging, all the data is encrypted, users are anonymous and session transcripts are never saved, unlike with email or IM.

Foley, 44, is now volunteering a couple hours every week. He just completed his ninth book (three are children's books), ***Countdown to Lockdown***, which will be out in September. I called him last week to find out how a hardcore wrestling legend came to fight such an unexpected battle.

Click [here](https://ohl.rainn.org/online.rainn.org/) to go directly to the RAINN online hotline.

OK, help me out here. Wrestling. Rape crisis hotline. What's the connection?

It doesn't seem like a likely collaboration. I've been trying to think of

way to say this that won't sound crazy. I started as a big **Tori Amos** (<http://www.toriamos.com/>) fan, and I knew she co-founded RAINN. I met her for the first time at **Comic-Con** (<http://www.comic-con.org/>) in July 2008, in San Diego. One night after that, I taught myself how to get on the computer. I had no idea how to use a computer before that. I went to the RAINN website.

OK, this is the part where I hope I don't sound crazy. The father of a friend of mine, who did six months in prison for protesting a government policy, gave me a book called ***Soul of a Citizen*** (<http://www.amazon.com/Soul-Citizen-Living-Conviction-Cynical/dp/0312204353>). I read the book and understood that a concerned citizen would look at the world as a puzzle and try to figure out where they could contribute to make it better. Even though I knew sexual assault and abuse were important issues, I never thought it was a place where I could make a difference. I had concentrated my time and energy on kids and injured troops. But looking at the RAINN literature, I realized this was an issue not heard often enough, and when I did hear about it, it wasn't coming from a male voice. Some kind of inner voice made me feel like I might be able to do something positive.

Can I go back to something you said earlier: You hadn't used a computer until 18 months ago?

I thought I got along fine without it. I liked writing my books by hand. I saw how much time was wasted on the computer by otherwise productive people. I saw marriages ending. I just didn't think I needed it. My fear was that I wouldn't have the same connection between my

brain and the keyboard as I did with longhand, but I wrote the afterward to my book on the computer, and I think it's one of the best things I've written, so now I'm not worried about it. I'm proud of the fact that although I may have caved in to technology, I held out for a long time.

Have you been a late adapter for other technologies?

I was the last wrestler to get [a smart phone]. I was still going out in the audience and using payphones long after everyone had a phone. About a year ago I started texting and emailing from my phone.

OK, so back to RAINN.

When I went to Sierra Leone in November 2008 to visit the little boy I sponsor and to visit some schools I'd funded, I met some women who had been victims of rape during their civil war. I don't know if I would have appreciated what they went through without what I knew about RAINN. It was a powerful day, to meet the woman and see the children of rape. I asked **Child Fund International**

(<http://www.childfund.org/>) to come up with a program that provides loans and scholarships for the victims. I decided to donate half the money from my book advance to this program and the other half to RAINN. I have a legendary reputation for thriftiness in pro wrestling. So any decision I make about money is a well thought out, belabored one.

It was after that I had started thinking about volunteering. Before that, my [volunteer work] was mostly showing up at different places and shaking hands. Volunteering for RAINN seemed to be a little more

hands-on and challenging. It feels as important as anything I've ever done, including writing and wrestling

Describe the training process for online hotline volunteers.

It's a 40-hour online training program, which includes 15 hours of in-person training. When I had my first practice session with another volunteer, I just fell apart. I couldn't bring up some of the resources on the computer. It was among the worst experiences of my life. My kids heard things they'd never heard from me. They didn't know I knew how to curse.

By the next week when I did my real session, partially supervised, I was much more comfortable. Last week I did my first unsupervised shift. I had a session with a young lady who had been raped by someone she knew at school. It was a difficult session, but at the end I really felt like I'd helped her. I think there's a role for someone like me who has not been a victim. You have to learn to communicate in all different types of situations, whether they were confronted by date rape, incest, physical abuse, or it's a woman trying to escape an abusive relationship.

What's it like trying to help people online?

RAINN has found that so many people are comfortable with the technology, and the anonymity that the computer provides may make the difference between someone reaching out and just burying it. They have my first name when they sign in. There are times when the [screen] goes dead. Some women understandably may not want to

talk to a man. But for the young lady I talked to, I think she appreciated my perspective. I told her I have four children, including a daughter about her age. She was very worried about what her parents might think. In those cases you have to continually reassure victims that they are victims. We let them know how brave it is for them to reach out for help.

How has your family responded to your new volunteer work?

My wife is very supportive of this. The kids don't understand why I'm so cheap on groceries and have the worst car of any of their friends, but I'm willing to donate so much to this cause. I don't lecture them; I just hope they'll figure it out on their own one day.

The "worst car." What is it?

A 2002 **Chevy Venture** (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chevrolet_Venture) minivan that my kids will beg me not to pick them up in, so I make it a point to do just that, so they learn some humility. I don't like having nice things, because then they just get less nice.

I see that you've also started blogging recently.

I don't use that word. I go out of my way to call it a web log. I do a weekly column for **TNA Wrestling** (<http://www.tnawrestling.com/>). Last week I did an outtake from my book about my long-term crush on **Dorothy Hamill** (<http://www.dorothyhamill.com/>). I did another one on Haiti. More often than not it's about the wrestling show.

What's a typical day like for you?

In the last few days, I finished the book, finished the volunteer training. My son was concerned I wasn't fully appreciating his Christmas present, so I watched 11 episodes of **24** (<http://www.fox.com/24/>) in two days. Today, I got the kids ready for school. I do a lot of dad things. I try to volunteer at least once a week outside RAINN. I can honestly say I'm never sitting around doing nothing. I'm never bored.

I realize I didn't ask you anything about wrestling, but I really don't know the first thing about it.

That's OK. I'm all wrestle-questioned out.

Image: Flickr/[Eva Rinaldi](#)

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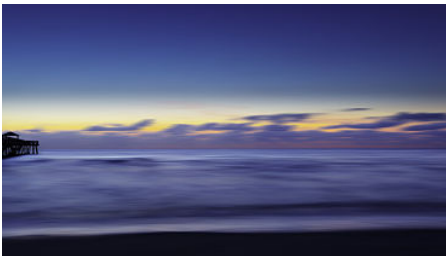


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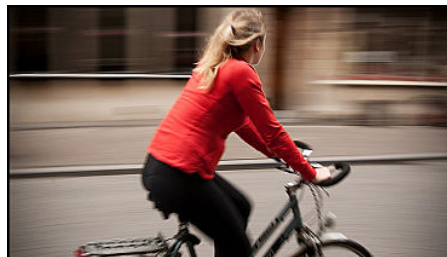
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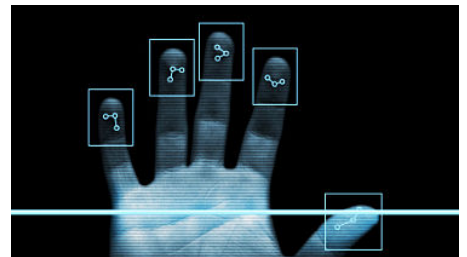


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