



Transcript : Council of Europe interview with Gloria Viseras

Welcome Gloria Visera, you are a former gymnast from Spain, and I believe that you performed, you were in the Olympics in Moscow in 1980 but you have a very specific experience, you're also a survivor of sexual abuse in sport.

Can you tell us about your experience?

Well, I cannot give a date as to when it started. It started very slowly and followed a period of say, preparation, you know, intense manipulation.

How old were you at the time?

I started at 10, I think the sexual abuse started around 12 until 15...

And who was your abuser?

My coach

This was somebody that you've known for quite some time.

I started working out with him and you know, he started coaching a group of young hopefuls and we started like with games and with little seduction games, you know, we thought that was very funny and it all came, you know, one thing after another.

Do you believe that it was premeditated, that it wasn't just something that occurred?

It was premeditated obviously yeah.

And how did that affect your performance because you were a top-level gymnast, a very young person at 15, how did that, what impact did that have?

I always think, I mean, there was an intense, intense fear and confusion. I think if we didn't have that, you know, if I didn't have that, because fear is very blocking, and I think I could have been a much better athlete. But the problem is not the performance, I mean, you look back and you know those are only some years of your life. The life of the person is much longer than the life of the athlete. The consequences are much harder on the person for the rest of your life, you know, after your sporting career is over.

But you've obviously processed what happened to you, was it very hard?

It was very hard, and I only processed it 30 years later. At the time you only want to block it, you know, you go like a robot with your day, with your chores, you get up in the morning and, you know, fight that urge to throw yourself from the window. You have health problems like eating disorders, and you try to go on with your life the best you can. Raise your kids, you still have to wake them up in the morning and take them to school, and it comes to a point in your life where you have to say, 'it's enough, you know, me too, this is



what happened to me, enough silence.' You have to do it for yourself, you have to do it for your children, and you have to do it for other kids so that they don't suffer abuse.

What is it from your point of view that makes the fact that you are abused in the context of your sporting activity, what is it that makes that an important issue?

Because my sport is a sport where you start at a high level when you're very, very young and you are very vulnerable and if the system does not have all the control mechanisms in place you put the kids at a very high risk.

Were there things that people could have done, that you could have done, to protect yourself at the time?

The responsibility shouldn't be put on the kid. The kids, you know, it's not for the kids to report abuse but for the adults to protect them.

Sure, but looking back...

Looking back of course I should have told my parents, but for me, I mean, he was an idealized adult. To everybody he was a hero. He was very well respected, who was going to believe me? Sometimes kids scream out for help and adults cannot see it. I think you need to have an open line of communication with kids, really observe and listen. I think the problem is that, you know, after 30 years I found out also that pretty much everybody knew that something was going on and nobody did anything about it.

How did you find that out?

Talking to people. My father pulled me out of there when I was 15 and after that I disappeared from the world of sport. I didn't want to have anything to do with it. I didn't watch gymnastics on TV. I didn't want to have anything to do with it. But 30 years later I had the chance to meet my former teammates again. We started talking I realized that I had not been the only one, and that pretty much you know it was a topic in all the circles in the sport and nobody did anything. So, he was very powerful, very well, you know, he had some success, he won some medals, so nobody did anything, everybody covered it up.

Gloria, if you had one piece of advice to give to young athletes today what would that be?

To have somebody you can trust to speak about things, you know. I always say that before a kid can say something important, he or she must be able to say a lot of unimportant things to you. So, you need to have somebody who listens to you and you know and verbalize what's going on

Thank you very much for giving us your opinion on things and your experiences.

You're welcome

Gloria Viseras currently works in the Safeguarding Department at FIFA.

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