

FACILITATED
COMMUNICATION

A monster that threatens and
deceives

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Roeland Vollaard

Facilitated communication
A method without any validity

Ralph Schlosser, research review, 2014

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www.alliantietegengefaciliteerdecommunicatie.org

roelandv@icloud.com

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PART 1

IN A STATE OF
ACCUSATION

CHAPTER 1

CAN YOU COME WITH US ?

“Can you come with us, we need to talk to you.”

That’s strange. I was just about to leave with the girl. As always, I would lift her wheelchair onto the wheelchair bike, climb on behind it myself, and take her home, bumping along gently along the way. A nice way to wrap up a successful weekend stay. But Sabine, the girl’s caregiver, looks at me in a way I’ve never seen before. It’s a cold look, or no, better, an angry look. After ten years of a pleasant working relationship, Sabine is looking at me for the first time with something close to rather intense anger.

It’s mid-February 2020, around three thirty. If looks could kill, I would have died on the spot under Sabine’s stare. “Someone else is already taking the girl home, we’ve arranged that. Her mother knows about it. This conversation that we’re about to have is very important, which is why two other colleagues are also present.” With these words, the worst ordeal of my life begins.

What hits me immediately: they’re thinking of sexual abuse. What else could explain the anger in those eyes? They suspect sexually inappropriate behavior, from me toward the severely disabled thirteen-year-old girl.

I realize right away that this is going to be a hopeless case, for everyone. A case about nothing, but devastating all the same.

Trust comes on foot but leaves on horseback, so to say. If the horse bolts, like in Sabine’s mind, the animal won’t easily find its way

back to the safety of the stable. Fear makes the horse rear and gallop. Distrust takes hold right away.

And indeed, fear of sexual abuse turns out to be at play. Words had come from the girl's speech computer, words that could be seen as suspicious. And off raced the panic-horse. Safe Home was called for advice; the girl's mother was contacted to talk it through. Sabine and her two colleagues tell me all of this with emotions running high. Angry, upset. But also, uncertain and doubtful. Tears are flowing.

So, I automatically do what I usually do. Help. It's not for nothing that I'm the supervisor of this day center for children with severe multiple disabilities. The Dutch center that bears the name Nobody Left Out. A day center that lets these children grow up in close proximity to non-disabled elementary school children, while at the same time striving to provide good care.

I am the manager of Sabine and her colleagues. And I say to them: "At my previous employer, there's a team that can help in situations like this, I'll bring them in. There is absolutely nothing going on of what you fear, but of course I will call the Board of Supervisors! You have done what can be expected of you in this situation."

Things like that. Reassuring things.

I will later find out that even friendly and responsible responses can be used against you when an accusation is made. I later read in the police file, *he didn't seem surprised at all, he must have prepared for this*. As a thrown rider, I won't be able to count on much support, as I will come to experience, even though it's not my fault that the horse bolted.

It's now almost five thirty. The lobby of Nobody Left Out always felt so pleasant, but now, after ten years, it suddenly feels very bleak. Something awful has overwhelmed me, like a bolt from the blue. I feel surprised and tired at the same time.

I pick up my phone and go to call someone from the Board of Supervisors.

CHAPTER 2
THE THREAT OF A
MOTHER

It's a beautiful winter's day, a week later. Sunny, cold air, little clouds of warm breath dancing around me. There are so many footprints from my childhood here that I can dream the path. The trees and bushes have grown quite a bit, but the paths remain unchanged. I walk here to find the right path back, in my mind. The bolt from the blue still completely haunting me. I realize that much of what I hold dear will probably be lost. A painful realization. With firm, confident steps, I try to push back the rising headache.

Something vibrates in my coat pocket. When I pull out my phone, I see it's Wim, the chairman of the Board of Supervisors of Nobody Left Out. I like Wim; he is the father of an endearing boy with severe disabilities. We've known each other, thanks to that son, for fourteen years now.

"Where are you at the moment?" Somewhere in the Veluwe, the Rozendaalse Veld, my birthplace.

"That's good, Roeland. How are you holding up?" Good question. Sigh.

"Yeah, you know, Wim, it feels strange. I'm okay, more or less, but at the same time, of course, it's all really awful." Now it's Wim's turn to sigh. And then: "Yeah, I can imagine." Five minutes later, I put the phone back in my coat. Nice that he called.

The Board of Supervisors suggested that I call in sick. But I can't, because I'm not sick. I won't lie.

I'm more straightforward than is sometimes convenient for others. Some people call it a bit autistic. When something doesn't make sense in my head, I simply can't get it out of my mouth. That makes finding smooth solutions difficult, like in this situation for the Board of Supervisors. If I were to say I'm sick, the board would get a little more time to maneuver. But saying I'm sick is lying. It's lying to parents and colleagues. I don't want to do that. They have a right to the complicated truth.

Because of this, the Board of Supervisors has a problem. Staff will start asking some tough questions. "Where is Roeland? He's never absent. Why do Sabine, Ilona, and Jantine have tearful eyes but won't say anything? And where is the girl, actually?"

I've made up my mind. If even one person doubts my moral compass, I can no longer be the supervisor of Nobody Left Out. Great work requires great trust. If trust in me ends, my work also ends. So, I'm going to resign. I will forego any severance pay, because I don't want to be a financial burden on the children. Of course, some people will later label even that as suspicious...

So, soon I will be sidelined at Nobody Left Out, the initiative I enthusiastically founded ten years ago.

Such thoughts drift through my mind as I walk across the Rozendaalse Veld. And suddenly, a jolt of fear!



Image: Wikipedia

Face to face with a Scottish Highlander. A massive beast. I immediately see a calf walking next to this big-horned danger -- scary business! How old is the calf, six months?

Scottish Highlanders are calm, easygoing animals. But if a Highland cow thinks you're a threat to her young, a primal force is unleashed. Beautiful and powerful.

Without hesitation, a mother will charge at you, with a love that destroys everything in its path, and toss you upside down.

Mother Highlander and I stare at each other; I hold my breath. The tension on this forest path rises... who's going to make the first move? I decide to take a few steps back and choose a different path.

After twelve years of working with dedication, love, and joy for the girl, her mother's position toward me became completely clear. She wants to lock horns with me. Our shared path has suddenly become impassable.

CHAPTER 3

MOTHERS' RIGHT TO SPEAK

As a victim or next of kin of a serious crime, you have the right to speak in certain cases. The following crimes grant this right:

- *Crimes for which the suspect can receive a prison sentence of 8 years or more, as well as a number of other offenses, such as serious assault and threats.*

The right to speak means that you are allowed to say something in the courtroom during the hearing. You can then tell the judge, the suspect, and the public prosecutor what the crime has done to you. For example, you can describe what you experienced and the impact the crime has had on you. The suspect is often present during the hearing. Journalists and members of the public may also be in the courtroom. (Public Prosecution Service website)

Four years after the terrible accusation against me arose, the final hearing in court is taking place. It's now June 2024. Nobody Left Out is well represented in the courtroom with over twenty staff members. There could have been forty if they had all been able to attend. These twenty either looked at me angrily as I entered, or avoided eye contact altogether. It felt harsh and cold to me, as the founder of Nobody Left Out. Journalists from *De Telegraaf* and a regional newspaper are also present,

and, of course, the girl's family. Their lawyer, the public prosecutor, a court clerk, and three judges are all present.

Of course, I am present too. I never even considered not showing up! I brought a kind witness with me and left it at that. Two against forty, that's how it feels now, sitting in the defendant's seat. In the image below, you can place me directly opposite the three judges, with the court clerk to the left of them and the public prosecutor to the right.



Image: quiziet.com

The mother has been granted her right to speak. She wants me to be convicted, then receive a prison sentence, and never again work with children or people with disabilities. The mother is also allowed to speak on behalf of the girl, using words the girl is said to have expressed through her computer.

The girl is now an adult and is presumed capable of expressing herself via the computer. That makes it especially noticeable that the computer is not attached to her wheelchair. It is her mother who is speaking, on behalf of this adult. Why?

So, the mother is allowed to speak both on behalf of the girl and on her own behalf. You wouldn't be able to infer that from the official wording about the right to speak. Should I object to this? I decide to just let it go, but it feels odd.

What also struck me in the Public Prosecution Service's description of the right to speak is that it talks about *the crime and its consequences*. Even though it hasn't yet been established whether a crime actually occurred. Is there even an act, a perpetrator, and/or a victim? That is exactly what this hearing is about, and the judges will use all the evidence and the hearing itself to determine the answer. So, there is a right to speak about a crime and its consequences, even though none of that can actually be assumed to exist. I find it rather strange, and it doesn't feel right.

I came across this phenomenon at various moments during the proceedings, by the way, and regularly protested against it. People would usually stare at me blankly: "what are you getting worked up about?"

Here in the courtroom, it becomes an intense and emotional plea from the mother. It is a plea in which she states that I repeatedly raped her daughter. And how terrible all of that has been for the girl and the rest of the family, right up to this day. That Scottish Highlander butts me with her horns with no mercy. "That I may burn in hell", is the closing sentence.

The courtroom has fallen completely silent. The girl has felt the anger of the mother, I can hear her tense sounds behind me.

The three judges watched me attentively during the mother's tirade. After a few seconds of silence, the chairman of the three asks whether I wish to respond. Phew...

Both the intensity and the content of the mother's plea seemed entirely logical to me. Because she believes it is all true: an act, a perpetrator, a victim. I enjoyed visiting this family, and I have always had great understanding and respect for the care of this complicated and severely disabled girl. I therefore do not want to cause this mother any more pain, but at the same time she is accusing me of the worst thing you can accuse me of.

Completely unjustly, for four years now, without interruption.

I do wish to respond and say only: "The pain is clear and understandable, but the assumption is incorrect."

The prosecutor repeats this sentence later when she demands an acquittal for me on behalf of the prosecution. The assumption that the girl spoke and therefore accused me was absolutely impossible to substantiate. And evidence of any form of inappropriate behavior on my part was also nowhere to be found. Unfortunately, the journalists leave out these facts, and the arguments I put forward, from their articles. The dirt they have on me is described at length, unfortunately there is very little room for nuance in the newspaper. I know it, and am disappointed nonetheless.

Professor of forensic psychology Bruno Verschuere noted in late 2025 in the journal “De Psycholoog” that when solving crimes, the emotions of those involved can play a risky role:

In the case of a serious crime, our first reaction is that the perpetrator must be punished as quickly as possible. Society and the media push for this, and the police must also suppress the intuitive, automatic response to apprehend the perpetrator as quickly as possible.

This focus on the perpetrator can cloud judgment, Verschuere continues later in the article. For example, whether there is even a perpetrator at all. The emotions of people who believe something terrible has happened are often intense. What they suspect in this case is, of course, horrible. But those very emotions play a disruptive role in careful investigation. Do journalists fall into this same trap just as easily?

On the cover of “De Psycholoog”, I also read this quote from Verschuere: “Just because victims cry does not mean they are telling the truth.”

I recognize this pitfall in myself. Conversation partners who are highly emotional trigger my sympathy, even though I often cannot yet know whether there’s actually any real suffering. Here in the courtroom, however, I know it one hundred percent: the mother’s pain is completely clear, but her assumption that something terrible has happened is completely false.