

VICTIM SPEAKS OUT ABOUT DEVASTATING AFFECT OF CHILD ABUSE ON HER LIFE

Former Georgina foster parent and convicted child pornographer Wayne Relf pleaded guilty to one count of sexual interference in June.

He is serving 83 days in prison for this crime.

He admitted to inappropriately touching a girl under his care from when she was seven until she turned 16 during the 90s.

He was sentenced to one year in prison, but was given a two-for-one day credit for time served in Toronto on another child sex charge prior to the conviction, reducing his sentence to 83 days.

The sentence did not take into account his previous conviction for making a pornographic video of his foster daughter. Because the latest conviction was for abuses that took place before the child pornography charges, the legal system treated it as a first-offence.

The following was written by one of his victims, who cannot be identified.

'How is this justice?'

When I was seven, my parents divorced and when I was eight, my mother married Wayne Relf.

My mother and I did not have the best of relationships at that time and she was very strict. Mr. Relf took advantage of the situation and offered me things in exchange for sexual favours. These things would range from money to outings or persuading my mother to allow me to do something I was not normally allowed to do.

I was only eight, so it is now difficult to remember how it all began or how it was introduced.

When I was 12, my mother and Mr. Relf became foster parents so my mother could stay home, as my entire childhood, she worked very long hours and I did not see much of her.

A few years later, one of our foster children accused Mr. Relf of touching her inappropriately. The Children's Aid Society was involved. They asked me, in front of Mr. Relf, if I saw anything or if I had anything to add.

Considering the situation and the fear Mr. Relf had set into me, I denied anything happened and told them nothing more.

No charges were laid and the complaint was dropped.

Now I ask myself, if I was approached differently, would my answer have been different?

I do not know. Mr. Relf said if I told my mother, she would not believe me and no one else would either. I was terrified of what would happen. I also didn't think he would do it to anyone else.

This continued until I was 16 and moved out with my boyfriend.

My late teen years were very rough, as I dropped out of school. I had a college fund that was set up by my parents and I was told, as long as I continued my education,

graduated, lived at home and was accepted, there was enough to pay for me to go to law school.

Things did not work out and I moved in with my biological father. I did go back to school at 17 and graduated by doing really hard work.

During this time, I gained about 150 pounds, trying to make myself unattractive. It has taken a huge toll on my health.

I moved out when my father separated from his second wife and was on my own again. I had jobs here and there to keep me going and met a man who I was with for nine years.

During this time, I was at my mother's to babysit her foster children. My mother and I went on Mr. Relf's computer to look at the weather network and accidentally found a movie made on a webcam of my foster sister. My mother and I called police and he was arrested and charged.

He admitted to my mother that evening what he had done to me after I asked him to. At the time,

the police approached me, but I was not in any state of mind to make a statement or go through what I had lived all those years ago to complete strangers.

He was convicted of child pornography charges.

We could not get things to work due to our age and personal problems I was having at the time.

I was trying to keep a relationship with my mother, but had to see my stepfather every time I saw her and wasn't able to tell her of

past events. This drove a wedge in the relationship with my boyfriend.

I am now getting married to my first love and things are slowly beginning to improve.

It is very difficult to get through such an ordeal and I don't think one ever truly recovers.

For years, I felt as though it was my fault. I felt as though I was a hooker. As the years passed, I realized it was wrong and the confusion turned into denial, as it was much easier to deal with.

I was robbed of my childhood, my innocence and my schooling to become a lawyer. I will never give up the dream to become a lawyer and maybe one day I will financially be able to pursue that dream.

I am currently seeking counselling as I still feel I have put these issues under lock and key in the back of my head and have not dealt with them.

It is difficult to find counselling or help, as the government does not provide many one-on-one professional services unless you are willing to pay a hefty fee.

I know I am an extremely strong woman, as I never turned to drugs and alcohol as a pain reliever, however tempting, but, instead, took what happened to me, buried it and continued on the journey of life.

If you can't change something, there is no point focusing on it. The police and victim witness program were excellent. They helped me in any way they could and kept me informed.

'You should, in a fair and normal society, know you are protected and safe not just from murderers and robbers, but from men who prey on innocent young children, take their hopes, dreams and innocence and give them a pain so harsh, so unbearable for the rest of their lives.'

Unfortunately, my relationship did not work. I moved out and eventually moved in with my first love. This is the man with whom I moved out with when I was 16. We were both young and immature but loved each other very much.

HELP AVAILABLE FOR VICTIMS

If you need to disclose sexual assault or abuse, there are places to turn.

The York Region Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault Care Centre offers medical attention up to 72 hours after an attack, as well as counselling for those who are disclosing weeks, months or years after an attack.

The service is confidential and police are not called, unless the victim wants them to be.

"We do suggest victims tell someone that they trust, someone close to them, a friend or family member," program coordinator Gail Rehfeld said. "It's much better to confide in at least one other person than carry it alone. It's also important they know they're not alone. It happens to other people, too."

Call 905-832-1406 and press 3.

Other resources include:

York Region Abuse Program, 905-853-3040, provides assessments, treatment and counselling of victims of child abuse

Children's Aid Society, 905-895-2318, 1-800-718-3850, to report a child being abused or neglected.

Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868, for children who need to talk to someone.

Family Services York Region 1-866-415-9723 - Markham, 1-888-820-9986 - Richmond Hill, 1-888-223-3999 - Newmarket, provides individual and family counselling.

Community Crisis Response Service (COPE), 905-310-2673, 24-hour emergency line for individuals, families and children experiencing an emotional crisis.

- Martin Derbyshire

Will new law curb abusers?

BY MARTIN DERBYSHIRE
Staff Writer

The news Wayne Relf is serving 83 days in prison for sexual interference has many questioning our child sex abuse laws.

"Why are judges so lenient and why is the government so lenient and so unwilling to walk the walk when it comes to protecting our children?" asked Dolina Smith, president of Canadians Addressing Sexual Exploitation. "It just blows my mind this government will not put laws forth to protect our kids."

Justice Minister Irwin Cotler says those laws are on the way.

The Liberals introduced legislation in October designed to protect children from sexual exploitation, violence and neglect.

- Bill-C2 proposes:
- Broadening the definition of child pornography;
 - Creating a new prohibition against advertising child porn;
 - Increasing maximum penalties for child porn and other child-related sex offences; and
 - Narrowing existing defences.

But will it be good enough? York-Simcoe Conservative MP Peter Van Loan looks at Mr. Relf's case in his riding and thinks not.

"There, still a lot that needs to be done," he said. "We're concerned the courts are not taking this seriously enough. There must be more serious consequences for repeat offenders."

Without mandatory minimum sentences and the elimination of conditional sentences, early release and two-for-one credits for sex offenders, the Liberals' latest bill falls short, he said.

"What we need is stronger minimum sentences, not maximums, since the judges are ignoring the maximums anyway," Ms Smith said, agreeing Bill-C2 may not go far enough.

Ms Smith would like to see the bill include 90-day minimum sentences for any child porn conviction and two years less a day for a second offence.

"Right now, the law amounts to a slap with a wet noodle and a warning they'll take your computer away," she said.

Bill-C2 was adopted June 9 and is before the Senate. Third reading will begin next week.

See PROBLEM, page 9.

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