

Gruesome story of victimization leads to redemption

The 37-year old man sat in the jury box and wept like a child whose electronic game device had been taken away from him. But it was much, much worse than that. He had just been sentenced to 40 years in federal prison for orchestrating a child pornography ring that harmed hundreds of young female victims. And his eight co-conspirators are following in his footsteps, not one of them having received less than 31 and a half years behind bars. It is one of those cases where tragedy reverberates on all sides, rocking and shaking all those affected by the crimes like turbulence at 35,000 feet.

The scene was a federal district court in Detroit. The sentencing hearing was the final nail in the coffin of the notorious “Bored Group,” a highly organized (and geographically dispersed) group of men who passed themselves as bored teenage boys and thus lured unsuspecting teenage girls into a network of private Internet chat rooms and manipulated them into stripping and performing sex acts on camera, recording the same and sharing them among themselves in what prosecutors said was a “perfection” of child sexual exploitation ring. The prosecution offered no terms and all of the men pleaded guilty to their crimes, motivated by their desire to protect their families from the horror of their well-coordinated scheme, which included threats to blackmail victims if they did not cooperate.

As the packed courtroom of victims, their families, press and curious (and horrified) onlookers gaped in disgust, U.S. prosecutors Kevin Mulcahy and April Russo detailed the precise methodology the group formulated to trick innocent, often vulnerable young girls into both exposing themselves and in some cases, hurting themselves, while pretending to be helping them come out of their shells and make new friends. The exact number of the gang’s victims is still unknown as many of the unsuspecting girls were not able to be identified or couldn’t be found. It is a tragic testament to the secretive and far-flung range of their “child exploitation criminal enterprise.”

The targeted youths included a troubled dancer who attended the finest ballet school in Canada and a girl who was coerced into performing a sex act with her dog. One youthful victim who chose to speak at the sentencing, a 20-year old from New Orleans, courageously described the shame, hurt and embarrassment she still experiences every day of her life. She told Federal District Court Judge Steven Murphy she still fears “the monsters beneath my bed.” Several parents also chose to speak and explained their complete mystification at how their daughters could be caught up in the heinous scheme. But stronger than their confusion was their anger. One after the other, they described the painful and long-term impact these crimes had upon their daughters’ physical and emotional health. (Apparently, the Bored Group did not sell or distribute the recordings they produced to anybody outside their ring, instead keeping them for their own twisted and perverse pleasures. However, an F.B.I. special investigator earlier reveals that they are pursuing the investigation into others “with vigor.”)

Group members knew some of the girls targeted by the “Bored Group” were anorexic, burning and cutting themselves,

committed to psychiatric wards and suicidal, prosecutors wrote. “I was scared if I didn’t do what they told me to do that I would become dead,” one girl told the judge. She was targeted at age 13 and lashed out by repeatedly cutting her arms. “I cut really deep. I tried to kill myself,” she told the judge as eight members of the exploitation ring sat feet away in the jury box and minutes away from decades long prison sentences. “I’m happy I’m here,” she told the judge.

The leader of the “enterprise”, the 37-year old who couldn’t stop sobbing in shame, handpicked members to join the group, which was described as sophisticated, organized and hierarchical. The men shared skills - several are computer experts with advanced college degrees - and a sexual interest in teenage girls.

“They were handpicked to be the best of the best at targeting children,” U.S. Attorney Russo told the judge. As she spoke, six teenage victims sat in a corner of the courtroom. One nervously chewed gum, two hugged each other, never letting go. Two girls had green highlights in their hair, an outward sign of solidarity. One girl stroked the ear of “Lance,” a black Labrador brought into court to soothe the fears of victims. “Thinking back to those days causes me to cry myself to sleep wondering when the monsters will stop haunting me,” the now 20-year old victim explained.

U.S. Attorney Mulcahy described how the men needed a strategy to identify and recruit victims and master techniques to manipulate girls as young as 10 into engaging in sex acts on a web camera. Members used fake profiles and stolen pictures of teenage boys to infiltrate a variety of social networking websites frequented by teenagers.

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The “Bored Group” had a division of labor. “Hunters” lured victims to the chatroom. “Loopers” posed as kids in previously recorded videos depicting sex acts while convincing girls to perform the same act. “Talkers” handled the next step, convincing girls to undress and masturbate on camera by engaging the victims in a variety of subjects, including school, family, sports and sex. That’s how they operated and how they got away with it for five years.

The reasons why victims don’t typically come forward to report their offending sexual experiences is detailed elsewhere in this issue of CURE-SORT News. Here, after explaining how it was done – and the depths of their depravity – it is important to relate how they have destroyed their own lives and shamed their families and colleagues. You see, the leader of the group wasn’t the only one to weep. Four others did too, while three others seemed to sit in frozen mortification, sometimes bowing their heads in sorrow, staring into space or simply closing their eyes in a futile effort to shut the world out of their minds.

“I’ve shattered so many lives. I’m really so ashamed of myself and all the harm I’ve caused my victims,” the 37-year old told the judge. “I never knew I could sink this low ... but I am sick. Pornography led me down a very dark road. If I was here as a parent instead of a defendant, I would be devastated.” Three supporters speak on his behalf in court that day: a Greek Orthodox priest, a family friend who is a judge in Georgia, and his father, who apologized to the victims. As he stood trembling and also in tears, the father said, “My heart goes out to the victims for the trauma my son has caused ... I am truly appalled by his actions. There is no excuse and punishment is justified.” He also described his son as a loving and doting father who used his college education to grow a fledgling company. “We’re still struggling to understand what he did,” the father said. “He’s an addict battling an addiction. With proper counseling, he can leave prison a better man ... I still love him.”

The final and most biting comments were offered by the judge. He observed he had never seen a more senseless and diabolical criminal conspiracy, one that “was calculated to inflict pain and shame on the least deserving innocents I can imagine.” He commended the defendants for cooperating with the prosecution but admitted they had little choice because the evidence against them was “chilling and overwhelming.” He then said, “our focus must of course be upon the victims whose lives have been forever altered by this abuse, but the shame and injury you’ve inflicted on your own families is perhaps the most cruel result of all. Sadly, you’ll each have the rest of your lives to dwell upon the pain you’ve caused so many good, blameless people.” And finally, the judge opined, “I take no pleasure in sending you to prison for the rest of your days; as far as I am concerned you’ve done this to yourselves and I am simply finishing it because that’s my job.”

Editor’s note: Two weeks after this article was written, the so-called ring leader described in the opening paragraph was murdered at a federal prison in Milan, Michigan. One of his co-defendants was injured--both by stabbing and beating. As of this writing, prison officials are still investigating who is responsible for these crimes.

CURE-SORT NEWS

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Myths vs. Facts

Myth: Men who molest boys are homosexuals or bisexual.

Fact: According to 10/5/2006 issue of *Pediatrics*, the Journal of the *American Academy of Pediatrics* 98% of molested males and 99.6% of molested girls are victims of heterosexuals.

From the Editor's Desk

By Joseph Ajlouny

It's a shame that one cannot escape news of sexual offenses and their prosecution. It's just so prevalent today. What prompted this observation was a day's worth of newspaper reading I recently endured. The three separate newspapers contained the following stories: 1) a report on sexual assaults being silenced at tropical resorts and upon cruise ships; 2) a report that child-on-child sexual abuse on foreign U.S. military bases is under-reported and not taken seriously; 3) a report of new allegations of sexual assault against a popular rock singer; 4) report about a top university medical researcher charged with child porn on his home and laboratory computers; 5) report from the U.N. General Assembly on the prevalence of sexual assault in war zones in Africa, Yemen and Afghanistan; 6) a report about a high school teacher who extorted sex from male students in exchange for better grades; 7) a prominent osteopathic pediatrician who was busted for computer enticement of minors for illicit purposes and possession of child sexually abusive material, i.e. child porn; 8) a report on the sentencing of a female Russian spy who was directed to infiltrate U.S. conservative groups such as the NRA and evangelical Christian organizations by utilizing sexual blackmail among other tools to compromise U.S. officials; 9) a report that despite the #MeToo movement, sexual assaults are still likely to be unreported because victims fear the intrusion to their privacy and anonymity.

And finally, a new FBI study reveals that despite the recent trend of empowering victims to speak up, the police "clearance rate" for sexual assault cases is at an all-time low. Two reasons are cited. First, many police departments are more likely to more accurately classify assaults as sexual assaults, thus increasing the number of unsolved cases in that category. And second, it suggests a lack of resources being devoted to investigating sexual assaults (and cases of domestic violence) as has been made evident by the backlog of untested rape kits that have been discovered across the nation in the past several years.

Experts agree that sexual offenses are among the most confounding crimes police and prosecutors confront, despite the fact that in the overwhelming majority of cases, the victims know their attackers. Many investigations lack corroborating witnesses and physical evidence. And a significant number of cases are reported long after they occurred. Additionally, some cases include multiple victims in far-flung places and are expensive to investigate and prosecute.

It's a sad state of affairs, no doubt. At CURE-SORT, we dedicate ourselves to prevention through education and treatment. Those tools, along with the humiliation and life-altering consequences of being convicted of such a crime should be deterrents enough. Perhaps this accounts for the fact that almost all reported sex offenses are committed by non-registered citizens. Let's keep it that way!

There are several 12-step groups that exist working with sexual addiction. We suggest **SLAA** as the best group and it is most fitting for those who do sexually offend. Its emphasis on sex and love (and relationships) addiction are specifically related to the majority of those with whom we receive communication who show an addictive type behavior.

What Recovery Looks Like

As we all know, the Catholic Church has become embroiled in a decades-long sex abuse problem, and maybe that's an understatement. The stories are all glaring and shocking. Many lives have been devastated, including hundreds of priests and bishops. A friend of *CURE-SORT News* sent us a column written by a priest named Father Dan in recovery for alcoholism. We thought it was worth sharing with our readers. It has been edited to suit our newsletter.

I was given irreplaceable gifts of life: loving family and friends, a great education, ordination into the Church Ministry and many opportunities during 71 years of life and 45 years of Church service. Yet, despite being blessed with these fine gifts, I became an alcoholic and hit "rock bottom" as it is popularly called. That's when my fear mushroomed into despair. Could I pull myself together and save my own life?

Admitting my reality -- physically, spiritually, psychologically, emotionally, socially and intellectually -- has been a challenge, the greatest I've ever been called upon to confront. It's also been an adventure. These adjectives are not used to make a list; they are chosen because they best describe my wreckage and what I needed to restore. No drama, just reality: alcoholism or any addiction can completely take over your life and become who you are...who you have become. My voyage into recovery gave me a new lease on borrowed time. My faith was a pillar of my recovery but it took more than that. I am fortunate I had the help and support of the wonderful people at a diocesan retreat home. I've learned to focus on my blessings, not my misfortunes.

Recovery looked easier in the beginning. Stop drinking, accept help, work a program (AA), learn positive new habits, rebuild your life and push on with hope and faith. None of this work is ever finished, but over time it changes and looks different and gets better. This transition does not mean it is always easy to face the changes of aging and loss, work/retirement, relocation, and redirecting my ministry as best I can. The big difference is that I now possess the tools treatment has taught me to use for my benefit.

What does recovery look like to me now? It is gratefully holding on to the prize, sharing it with others and being of service to the poor and hungry among us.

Strength Mantra for Legislators:

- I can be tough on crime and still not vote for any more sex offender restrictions.
- People will still like me if I don't vote for any more sex offender restrictions;
- I can win re-election even if I don't vote for any more sex offender restrictions.

registry20.org

The Ten Top Reasons for Non-Reporting

By Jacob B.

I recall one session of my sex offender therapy program most acutely. Like many others, I partially minimized my crime by taking comfort in the fact that my victim never reported the incident. I interpreted this fact as meaning she never felt assaulted and was a willing participant in our sexual encounter. The problem is, unbeknownst to me, she was under the legal age of consent and thus could not willingly participate. Statutory rape is a strict liability crime and thus offers no defense despite the uncontested facts. All my rationalizing and justifying was a sad indulgence for my shame. Only I placed myself in that position that day and only I allowed myself to be mistaken about her age. It wasn't that I didn't care; I just ignored it in the selfish heat of the moment.

At the session, group members were asked to offer explanations why sexual assault victims seldom report their cases to police, psychologists or social workers. My notes reveal the following reasons, in order of their vote.

1. Fear of reliving a traumatic incident;
2. Fear of invasion of privacy and intimate events;
3. Fear of not being believed;
4. Fear of disrupting family or personal relationships to which the attacker is a member;
5. Fear of being blamed as the instigator or willing participant;
6. Fear of condemnation and shaming;
7. No witness or evidence;
8. Failure to realize what actually occurred;
9. Fear of revealing an event kept as an intimate secret.
10. Knowing the offender will deny the abuse.

Note the number of times "fear" appears on the list. And it is not surprising because in my case as well, my victim testified she didn't want to come forward because she didn't want to "bother" with it. I knew then and there that it was not a matter of being a mere inconvenience, but was instead an effort to preserve her dignity and privacy. Nor did she want her parents and school friends to know her role in my crime. It was just more embarrassing than it was worth. And I don't believe she felt any sense of gratification for my incarceration, though her parents and the prosecutor clearly did.

I was thinking about this subject when the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation hearings were in the news. His alleged victims were trashed because they chose not to come forward decades ago. That supposedly made it more likely they were fabricating their stories. But then other women, many who are quite well-known, admitted that they were also victims long ago and they likewise were too scared to come forward. It was clearly an attempt to challenge the reluctance many felt about the allegations against the judge.

Perhaps it worked. Perhaps it didn't. Kavanaugh was narrowly confirmed; likely because his victims were disbelieved or waited too long and thus forfeited their right to complain. But that's a dangerous precedent in light of all we know today. The fact that a victim of such a personal violation doesn't come forward doesn't mean it didn't happen. It just means there are a lot of reasons why remaining silent makes more sense.

News About the Film *Untouchable*

Acclaimed Documentary Now Available for
Public Screenings

David Feige's award-winning documentary about a champion of pro-SOR restrictions and his advocacy of using erroneous claims of social science research to justify draconian policies on Florida registered citizens is now available for community screenings. The producer hopes that SOR reform advocacy groups will rent the film to show in their communities to bring attention to this important issue. A DVD of the film is also available from Amazon and all major streaming services for private viewing.

CURE-SORT News featured a story about Feige in our Autumn 2017 issue under the headline "The Big Lie About Frightening and High: Junk Science Pervades Debate." That item described Feige's crusade, begun with *Untouchable* in 2015, to document the perverse and wholly unscientific claim that the recidivism rate of sex offences was higher than widely believed. At that time, he took the debate one step further and posted a supplementary 8-minute documentary on the New York Times website under the name "A 'Frightening' Myth About Sex Offenders." This doc supported a Op-Ed essay he published in The Times on September 17, 2017 titled "When Junk Science About Sex Offenders Infects the Supreme Court."

Untouchable has won a number of prestigious awards and has been featured in many film festivals, and Feige won the top director award at the 2016 Tribeca Film Festival. He presented his film and described his odyssey in promoting it at the NARSOL conference in Cleveland last June. Most importantly, it is available for public and institutional screenings. It is Feige's hope that such screenings will stimulate discussion and reform efforts across the country. (Canada also has a SOR but it is not publically available on the Internet, which is mandated under U.S. law.)

Additional information about community screenings of the film are available by contacting outreach@untouchablefilm.com. The producer has also prepared complimentary materials to support discussion on the issues presented.

Losses to the CURE-SORT Family

Two special people to CURE-SORT and the CURE family have passed away in the past few months.

Former CURE-SORT Board member Barb Budinger of Marquette, MI, passed away late in the summer. She was one of the original supporters of the organization when it formed in 1990. Barb also was a regular donor.

Myrtle Bowers, of Norman, OK, mother of Director Wayne Bowers, passed away in early December after a brief illness. Myrtle was a regular donor for many years and known by the entire CURE family.

We say a silent "Thank you" and a sad "farewell."

From the Director's Desk

By Wayne Bowers

We received differing comments about the new California policy of integrating general population with those in protective custody. Some responders are still astounded about the move and the realization of potential danger. But DS in Washington, in prison since 2005, took a different stance, pointing out abuse and assaults he's seen while housed in facilities where those with sex offenses were segregated and also in general populations open to everyone. He made three points before a person removed their name from the database, noting they must accept reality that they are a person with a sex offense: 1) ask if we can send material to them in a nondescript envelope; 2) realize CURE-SORT is one of the few organizations that work for laws and policies that observe the basic rights and humanity of sex offenders, and 3) in today's world, anyone can find out what your charges are very easily.

One solution he gave might be to read the material, then tear the newsletter and envelope into small pieces and flush it down the toilet. A key is to be low profile and don't bring attention to yourself, find people with whom you are comfortable to hang around with. All have a different journey and deal with it differently and we wish you well.

A constant stretch of discrimination at all stages of criminal justice has been limitations on those with sex offenses compared to others incarcerated. Visiting room decorum may have differing restrictions and requirements for those with sex offenses. Programs within prisons and jails may not be available for those with sex offenses. Sentencing measures that continue to expand long-time prison sentences and lack of potential reduction in time for good behavior. Restrictions on lower level facility transfers available to most prisoners. Constant expansion of registrant restrictions and residency restrictions are just another extension of the types of difficulty for one with a sex offense as they move out of prison.

These types of discrimination are moving into other types of society. A great move in Florida was a new law to allow people on parole to be eligible to vote, which could add a major bloc of voters wanting reform. But a restriction to those able to vote is that a person with a sex offense was not eligible to vote.

The challenges of all advocates continue and the above listings are just a part of problems. Yet, it is encouraging to know of the growing organizations who are working for reform, either in organizations or individually. Another positive sign is the number of governors who have shown a desire to make criminal justice reform a priority and some have even shown a desire to assist in improvements for those with sex offenses. Some legislation occurs and in many instances the emphasis is to those with non-violent charges. We know there is much more needed but we should commend that start. And then we should hold those people accountable for those changes to be even bolder with recommendations that can assist people with more harsh sentences, but who numerous studies show are quite amenable to success.

Donation letters to our members in public have been made and we want to mention to any of you incarcerated that we always admire and appreciate you for your generous assistance to our work. So if you can do so, we wanted you to know this is a time we are seeking to increase our budget with anyone's assistance. We thank everyone for their support.

Large Involvement in Arkansas Prison Treatment Program

A member in Arkansas has told us of a treatment program he is taking that has around 800 men in it at any given time. Called the Reducing Sexual Victimization Program (RSVP), it is a six-month program with three modules.

The man who wrote said he is in his first month. He also reported Arkansas has opened its FIRST halfway house that will take people with a sex offense at Level 3 and 4. He said it is always full so it could be years to get accepted. He goes up for parole in October.

Washington Publication Seeking Pulitzer Prize For Series

Barbara Koepfel of Washington, DC, freelance investigative writer, has notified CURE of the article she submitted about the circumstances in civil commitment facilities around the country has been submitted for a Pulitzer by the **Washington Spectator**.

The article, "Sex Crimes and Criminal Justice" in the May 4, 2018 issue of the **Spectator**, was submitted in late January.

"I don't imagine winning," Koepfel said, but I'm hoping that by doing this, it gets more attention. . . since more attention is what is needed to help the men."

Google Group Update

We are reminding our readers and friends that our Google Group forum e-mail address is: (<https://groups.google.com/d/forum/cure-sort>) is always in need of contributions (in the form of Posts) from around the nation so we are all kept informed about what is happening here and elsewhere. Once again, the Group e-mail address is: cure-sort@googlegroups.com. It's easy to contribute. Just cut and paste your Post into an e-mail window and send it to the e-mail address. Remember, the purpose of Group is to share knowledge and its success is dependent upon contributions from all of us.

See top of next Column

Featured Website

The National Association for Rational Sex Offense Laws (NARSOL) considers itself a civil rights organization first and foremost. It is one of the nation's oldest, largest and best equipped non-profit organizations that combats the odious impact such laws have on offenders and their families. Its website is www.narsol.org and it is a complete resource on all aspects of the issue. Most importantly, NARSOL's position is that the rights of registered citizens must be observed and protected, and that SOR laws are designed to punish, not prevent such offenses.

The group's organizational statement says it all: "NARSOL envisions effective, fact-based sexual offense laws and policies that promote public safety, safeguard civil liberties, honor human dignity, and offer holistic prevention, healing and restoration." It promotes this mission by providing accurate public information and news posts in its website, organizing an annual conference where advocacy is strengthened, releasing publications on salient topics, lobbying state legislatures and perhaps most importantly, in instituting or joining litigation aimed at overturning the sharper aspects of SOR laws and enforcement practices.

To support registered citizens, NARSOL offers prison outreach programs and assistance to parolees. Its website also contains the latest news, research and opinion pieces relevant to the many divisive topics that SOR registrants and their families are forced to confront. The website also includes a range of videos from past conferences and interviews of notable experts in the field. It is updated almost daily and is the best go-to resource presently available on the Internet.

NARSOL also has a separate 501(c)(3) support foundation called *Vivante Espero*, which translates as "living with hope." The foundation funds publications and litigation expenses to challenge onerous provisions and their application. At the end of 2018, a generous anonymous donor made a \$50,000 contribution to the foundation and offered an additional amount as a matching grant to stimulate additional giving.

NARSOL's 11th conference for 2019 is scheduled to take place June 6-9 in Houston.

Myth vs. Fact

There are so many myths associated with sexual offending; it is difficult to know what the facts really are. In an effort to dispel the myths, we'll run two or three each newsletter so you will be armed with the facts to educate those who are less informed.

Myth: All sex offenders are child molesters and all child molesters are predators.

Fact: The FBI-UCR, National Crime Victimization Survey reveals that only 23% of sex crimes are against someone under 18; and the Bureau of Justice Statistics shows that predators represent around 3% of all sex offenders and child killers are less than 1% of all offenders.

Due to illness and other obligations Dr. Wiggington's column will not appear in this edition. She will return with the spring edition.

A Note to Our Readers about Mail

National CURE and CURE-SORT have received many letters and read many reports of new restrictions that corrections departments are placing on incoming mail. We urge you to report to us any difficulties you are having receiving *CURE-SORT News*. The standard procedures for impermissible mail typically requires a correctional facility to notify the recipient of mail that is being rejected. If our newsletter is being rejected by your facility, please let us know individually or through a family member or friend. While we recently cut our snail mail mailing list to member-subscribers who have furnished us with an email address to cut our costs, we remain dedicated to having our incarcerated members receive *CURE-SORT News* on a regular and timely basis. One suggestion we received is to request that your facility library subscribe. Or perhaps you can change your mailing address to your facility librarian, with advance permission of course. Either way, we need to know if you are not receiving our newsletter and we will do what we can to make sure you can and do!

New Life for Connecticut SOR Reforms?

In 2016, Connecticut passed a law directing the states Sentencing Commission to conduct a study of the state's sentencing, registration and management of convicted sex offenders. In the Autumn of 2017, the commission issued the first part of its report and concluded that the current system is complicated, unworkable and punitive and that neither of these mechanisms serves to enhance public safety.

Of course, no progress was made in getting the state's General Assembly to take up the report in 2018 due to it being an election year. But the chair of the GA's Judiciary Committee says he hopes to take up the measure before the end of the new year. Among the proposals made in the commission's report is to shift registration duration from an offense-based classification model to a risk-based model. And while it does not suggest altering the range of crimes that qualifies a person for registration, it does propose that registration times be shortened and that some registered offenders' information not be made public via the Internet.

As risk-assessment will likely be more widely embraced, it is very important for prisoners and registrants to seek treatment and recovery/rehabilitation and document it in every manner because it will likely be used in the future to evaluate dangerousness.

It is a thousand times better to have common sense without education than to have education without common sense.

Robert G. Ingersoll