



Man, 70, jailed for historic sex abuse

[JAMES GREENLAND](#) Last updated 13:00 29/11/2013

A Nelson man has been jailed for six years for historical sex offences against his young stepdaughter.

The victim spoke in the Nelson District Court at the sentencing of Stephen Robert Carter, 70, this week.

She described the deep psychological trauma she had lived with as an adult as a result of his controlling and manipulative sexual abuse in the family home.

She explained the difficulty of living under a "burden of secrecy", unable to tell anyone about what Carter did to her because of the effect it would have on his high standing within the Nelson Jehovah's Witness congregation.

Carter had admitted seven charges, including representative charges of rape, sodomy, inducing a girl under 12 to do an indecent act, permitting a girl under 12 to do an indecent act on another male, and counts of committing an indecency with an animal, and being party to an indecency with an animal.

The court heard that Carter converted to Christianity about three years after ceasing the sexual abuse, which he initiated under the false pretence of sexual education when his stepdaughter was 10 and 11.

In one of the first instances of "grooming", Carter showed the victim his semen under a microscope, the court heard.

Later, he made her perform various sex acts on him.

Over time, the abuse escalated, including rape and sodomy.

Carter also took the victim to an associate's house where she was made to perform sex acts on him, and sometimes on Carter at the same time, the court heard. That associate had been contacted by police and found unfit to plead.

The victim told the court she was 16 before she started to recall incidents of her stepfather's abuse.

"Remembering was always a very difficult process for me, because I never knew when it would begin.

"Different places that Stephen took me became sudden reminders [of his abuse] as an adult."

She said she had experienced periods of anxiety, depression and self-doubt.

"It has taken me a long time to stop being over-critical of myself."

After years of difficulty, and with the support of her husband, she tried to find some closure outside the courts by entering into a restorative justice programme with Carter, who had eventually admitted his crimes.

When she was unsatisfied with his engagement with the programme, she told police.

Detective Neil Kitchen, of Nelson, said the victim was "an absolutely amazing lady" who had demonstrated massive strength of character, first by speaking to police and then by reading her victim impact statement in court.

"I hope the sentencing helps the victim with closure," he said.

"It should also serve as a notice to offenders that no matter how long ago the offending was committed, the New Zealand police will bring you to justice."

Judge Tony Zohrab acknowledged the restraint and dignity with which the victim addressed the court, and reminded Carter that few victims would be as understanding and compassionate as his stepdaughter had been.

Carter was sentenced to six years and three months in prison.

His sentence was reduced after the judge took into account his guilty plea, his offer of \$20,000 in reparation to the victim, and his demonstration of otherwise good character during his life as a Christian.

The judge also noted that, although Carter was in generally good health, he would likely die in prison "if the sentence was too long".

Defence lawyer Steven Zindel told the court his client was remorseful for his "vile" behaviour, which was supported by his guilty plea and offers of reparation. "Her sadness is mirrored by his sadness at being here," Mr Zindel said.

It was Carter's "perverse sexual urge that took him to that bad place", but since the offending he had lived a righteous life, Mr Zindel said.

He described Carter as a "pillar of the community" and "one of the nicest people you could meet".

He said Carter had been stripped of all privileges within his church.

"He is still loved and respected as a fellow Christian, but he has fallen some way from grace, and no-one feels that more than him."

Judge Zohrab said Carter must face justice for his crimes, no matter how long ago they were, or how he had lived since.

"You have had the benefit of living the prime of your life without being held to account.

"When you leave this world the victim will still be grappling with the impact of what you've done to her, long after you are gone."

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