

'Abused by my brother, then shunned by my Jehovah's Witnesses family after I went to police'

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Louise Palmer says parents sided with evil Richard Davenport over her, while church offered only prayers and urged her not to go to police

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Louise and Richard as children

Former Treasury worker Richard Davenport was jailed for 14 years last month after sickening sex attacks on a little girl in the 1980s. That little girl was his sister Louise, who today bravely waives her right to anonymity to claim that she was made an outcast by her own parents after going to the police. And she claims that she was failed by the family's Jehovah's Witnesses' community, which she says had shockingly tried to hush up the abuse.

Sobbing heavily, Richard Davenport turned to his sister in the car and begged: "Please don't tell the police – I'm not prison material."

Louise Palmer hesitated but then tentatively agreed, showing her elder brother what he had never shown her during her childhood: kindness, compassion and protection.

Depraved Davenport had sexually abused his little sister during the 1980s when they lived in Halesowen, a manipulative monster in the midst of a strict Jehovah's Witnesses family.

Louise kept her ordeal secret for decades after emotional blackmail and threats from her brother, but eventually went to the police following what she says was a final betrayal by her parents, who she claims chose their son and religion over her.

And she believes the Jehovah's Witnesses wanted to hush up the abuse because of a shocking and little-known "two-witness rule", which meant they did not alert the police when allegations were made to them. Instead, they offered only prayers for the victim.

Last month, Davenport, 47, was jailed for 14 years at Wolverhampton Crown Court after being convicted of two rapes and three indecent assaults on Louise. He had admitted two other indecent assaults on his sister.

It was abuse which started when she was just four or five years old.



Richard Davenport

Their parents Trevor and Diane were in court every day – but Louise says not for her. She says they there for their son who had shown no remorse, only arrogance, throughout the harrowing trial.

Since going to the police Louise, 38, says she has been cast out by her family and the Jehovah's Witnesses. She is no longer a member of the church, now facing calls for reform to protect other abuse victims.

Today Louise, a remarkable and inspiring mum-of-two, reveals how she survived a childhood dominated by fear and religion thanks to her “true family” – her children, friends and loving fiancé Kevin Tucker.

“My parents chose my brother over me, even when they knew what he had done,” she says. “I can never ever forgive them for that.

“I was very, very close to my mum. We were best friends. How she has reacted is not the mum I know.

“But I’m speaking out now because I want other abuse victims to know that, no matter how long ago the crime, no matter how many years have passed, they can come forward and they will be believed.

“Help is out there. They are never alone.”

“I don’t actually remember being scared, but there were things he forced me to do. As I got older he would tell me that, if I told, I would go into care and he would go to prison. It was blackmail.”

Back in the 1980s the Davenports were seen as a respectable and God-fearing family. They were leading lights in the Jehovah's Witnesses community in their hometown of Halesowen.

During their marriage they'd had four children: Richard, Ian, another son and their youngest child Louise.

A family caravan was parked at the end of their garden.

It was there, as jazz music played in the background, that 14-year-old Richard Davenport groomed, and then first began the sick attacks on his sister.

Birmingham-born Louise recalls: “My memories of Richard start at that point. I would have been four or five years old.

“I remember how he used to wear patchouli oil and burned incense sticks, while jazz music would be playing. He also had books on the occult in the caravan – I don’t know why, because that was against what the Jehovah’s Witnesses stood for.

“I don’t actually remember being scared, but there were things he forced me to do. As I got older he would tell me that, if I told, I would go into care and he would go to prison. It was blackmail.”





Louise aged around seven

The abuse took place between 1982 and 1988, always in the caravan, and only stopped when Louise began her periods and Davenport feared getting caught out.

Louise remembers: "He said we had got to stop 'because you might get pregnant'. It never happened again.

"Somehow I just pushed what had happened to me into a little 'self-preservation box' inside my head and tried to forget."

Davenport first left home at 16, having quit the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation some two years earlier. He worked in Scotland as a gamekeeper and then over the years travelled to, and lived in, London, Holland, France and Ireland.

Other jobs included carpentry, diving and a brief stint working in the Treasury Department.

He would eventually return and settle down in Scotland, where he married, had children and even became a school governor in recent years.

But the demons he had created continued to haunt Louise, who had endured a suffocating childhood in her strict family religion which put God above all else.





Louise Palmer

“I have very few happy memories of my childhood,” she says. “It was a tense, stressful atmosphere we lived in.

“As Jehovah’s Witnesses we didn’t celebrate Christmas or birthdays, Bonfire Night, Valentine’s Day... There was really nothing we celebrated as a family.

“We were not allowed to have boyfriends or socialise with others who were not in the religion.

“But school was a great outlet for me because I could be whoever I wanted to be, which was often the class clown. And at Christmas I would spend my dinner money buying Christmas cards, so I could give them to my friends without my mum or dad ever knowing.”

During her teenage years Davenport dropped in and out of her life on return visits home, only once mentioning what he had done, when Louise was in her early teens.

“We had been to the cinema and on the way back he said he thought we should tell Mum and Dad,” she recalls.

“I said ‘no’. I feared I would get into trouble because I had kept it a secret.

“I now know that he was being controlling, manipulative. It was reverse psychology – ‘Forget it now then, I gave you the option to tell’.

“He just wanted to keep that fear there.”

The years passed by and Louise married, became a mum, and divorced as contact with her brother was kept to a minimum. Death also struck the family, when her other beloved brother, Ian, died, aged just 24, from a heart attack.

For years the memories of what happened in the caravan remained hidden as Louise bravely tried to carry on with her life.

“I just remembered what had happened and shouted that our childhood was NOT as good as he was making it out to be.”

But that all changed when Davenport returned briefly to the parental home in the early 2000s and held court as a little girl relative sat on his knee.

“We were talking about childhood and Richard said, ‘It wasn’t as bad as you remember’, to me,” says Louise.

“I replied that it was, but he argued it wasn’t.

“The combination of the girl being sat on his lap and him talking about my childhood... it all suddenly came back to me, literally at that moment.

“I just remembered what had happened and shouted that our childhood was NOT as good as he was making it out to be.”

With such painful memories returning, Louise spent years in a cycle of self-destructive behaviour which she kept secret from the Jehovah's Witnesses community she was still a part of.

"I was drinking," she admits, "doing things I wasn't proud of, going out secretly clubbing, having secret boyfriends as I struggled with my self-esteem.

"I remember my emotions being everywhere. I was punishing myself for what happened to me and I never really respected myself.

"I just wanted someone to love me."

But reporting the abuse to police was not yet an option.

"The fear of me being put in a children's home was gone because I was an adult," she says. "But now it was the fear of splitting my family up, or my dad or nan keeling over and dying because they were both ill. I didn't want that on my conscience."





Louise on holiday with parents Diane and Trevor Davenport

The situation eventually came to a head in 2005 when Louise decided to tell her father, by now a respected “elder” in the Jehovah’s Witnesses congregation she was also a member of.

Upon hearing the news, she says Trevor Davenport fell to the floor and began wailing. She claimed three other male church leaders were then invited to hear what she had revealed about her brother.

“I was told they would strongly advise me against reporting it to the police,” she says. “It would bring reproach on God’s name and look bad for the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

“They thrust a couple of Awake magazines in my hand and said there were stories of other sisters who had been through a similar situation of abuse, and that they had turned to Jehovah and prayed. They said our religion would help me get over it.

“They also said I couldn’t get counselling because that would also be talking to outside sources and would bring shame on our religion.

“They said, ‘If you want to get counselling come to us.’ But why would I go and speak to three men about my sexual abuse?

“They were sympathetic but basically said not to burden the congregation by telling any of my friends because it could bring them down spiritually. I was embarrassed because I was thinking, ‘Did I do anything wrong? Was it me?’

“I didn’t feel I got the support I should have got. It was gut-wrenching.”

Louise later learned of the religion's "two-witness rule" relating to child abuse claims. This stated that allegations could only be investigated internally if a second witness had been present.

The shocking rules are supposedly laid down in a secretive book given to all Jehovah Witnesses' elders, and are now being challenged by campaigners who believe other victims are going unheard and abusers unpunished.

Louise says: "I knew elders had a book, because my dad used to keep his in his briefcase.

"The church did not advocate child abuse but the main concern of those who spoke to me seemed to be about whether Richard was a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses when he did this.

"I came out thinking that if I actually went to police I would be disciplined by my religion because they had told me it was not a good idea.

"Going to the police didn't seem an option."

"Richard broke down crying, yet didn't say sorry for raping me as a child. He was making excuses."

THE shocking truth dawned on Louise Palmer's father when he confronted her brother in a long-distance phone call.

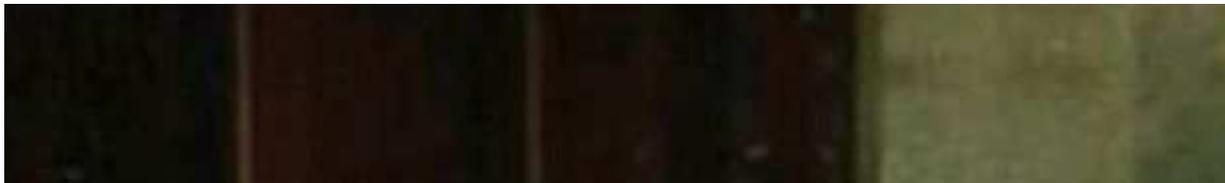
"He was told, 'Whatever Louise has told you is the truth, I've been waiting for a long time for the call,'" she reveals.

After that my mum wrote him a letter, saying she was disgusted and that she wanted nothing to do with him.

"But my dad carried on with contact with him."

The parents eventually tried to resolve the simmering situation by getting the brother and sister together – inviting both to meet in their new family caravan.

Louise understandably refused, but parked up in her car outside for a face-to-face meeting.





Richard Davenport

Her brother cynically offered excuses for his behaviour, including that he had become sexually active before the abuse started.

Louise recalls: "Richard broke down crying, yet didn't say sorry for raping me as a child.

"He was making excuses, saying there was a lot going on the house, he wasn't really happy, he had hormones and had already been sexually active.

"He then broke down and said, 'Please don't go to the police. I'm not prison material. I won't cope in prison'.

"It was emotional blackmail all over again. It was 'I'm your brother, I love you loads, we have both got families now'.

"We agreed at that point that I would not go to police and I thought I would be OK with that. I agreed for the family."

As she tried to rebuild her shattered self-esteem, Louise ignored the Jehovah's Witnesses' warnings and turned to counselling.

She was advised to write a letter to the person who had hurt her, but then destroy it rather than send it.

"I thought 'Why shouldn't he know how I feel?' she says. "So I posted the letter to him.

"I called him a paedophile and told him how he had affected my life, how I had to live with it for years, the self-destructiveness.

"I also told him I never wanted to see him again.

"Around a month later he wrote back, saying how sorry he was that he had ruined my childhood. I destroyed his letter."

"They were entertaining the idea of having a self-confessed paedophile in their house, as Jehovah's Witnesses, as my parents."

Davenport agreed never to return to Halesowen and Louise later reluctantly agreed to her parents travelling north once a year to see their son and grandchildren.

But then, in 2013, she learned that her brother and family were planning a holiday with their parents in Halesowen because her father was too ill to travel.

It was a double betrayal.

"I couldn't even ring my dad," says Louise. "I was so upset and angry, just distraught, so I texted them.

"I told Dad he had put me in a situation where Richard was going to be a couple of miles up the road, where I could bump into him with my children.

"They were entertaining the idea of having a self-confessed paedophile in their house, as Jehovah's Witnesses, as my parents.

"I said, 'You either uninvite him, or you go to Scotland. If you don't I will never set foot in your house again and I'm done with you as parents'.

"I knew I was asking them to choose, but I thought they would choose me.

"Then my dad texted me back: 'Let it go before it ruins your life and you ruin ours'.

"I sent a message back, 'You are disgusting. Maybe you can put it behind you and can have nice family holidays, but I'm the one who has to carry it round with me every single day.'

"By then I had left the religion, and my mum said, 'Well, we were not supposed to be having any contact with you anymore because you are not a Jehovah's Witness, so maybe this is the point we cut off'.

"I had been made an outcast, Richard had lost nothing. I was about to be ousted by my family because I had asked them not to have my abuser in their house.

"That was the end of the messages; that was the end of the contact with family.

"This one thing I had asked them to do was to protect me, yet they had failed to protect me for a second time.

"Now I had no reason not to go and report it."

Louise phoned West Midlands Police and then gave a recorded interview in August 2013. Officers arrested Davenport at his family home in Tayvallich in Scotland the following month. When the allegations were put to him, he stated: "It's a lie, you should have asked my mum and dad."

But in interviews he incriminated himself and admitted two indecent assaults, claiming he and his sister had been playing “doctors and nurses” but cynically claiming she was a willing participant.

He even whined that the thought of being caught had plagued him for years.

“To me, the anguish that I’d got over the years was equal to the anguish she’s been through,” he said.

For Louise, there was one final torment to endure – the trial, where she says her parents coldly snubbed her again.





Trevor And Diane Davenport

“As our car pulled up at the court, they pulled up at the same time with Richard in the car,” she recalls. “As they got out, they were stony-faced, so instantly I knew where I stood.

“I was taken in through the side door, they went in through the main entrance.”

For three days the court heard heartbreaking evidence of the abuse, including a video of Louise’s statement to the police. She also bravely took the stand for cross-examination.

When her brother took the stand he began arrogantly spouting denials, but ended up sweating and making crucial mistakes.

Her fiancé Kevin, 36, who was in court every day, said: “As the cross examination went on, he was physically sweating and kept adjusting his collar. You saw a man age before your eyes.

“While in court, Trevor would say to Richard, ‘Love you son, we are right behind you son’.”

Eventually, the jury retired and returned unanimous guilty verdicts on all charges in less than two and a half hours.

Louise rushed back into court as the judge warned her brother that he faced a substantial sentence.

“Because he had controlled me for so many years I wanted the last bit of control,” she explains. “I turned around and looked at him as if to say, ‘I got you. All those years, now it’s my time. You are getting your punishment and I’m getting my justice’.

“Richard was saying, ‘No it’s wrong’, and you could see the hatred in his face. My dad also said, ‘It’s wrong’.

“I just shouted, ‘No, it’s not wrong!’

“I was his little sister, he should have been protecting me, he was my brother.”





Richard Davenport

The following day Davenport was sentenced to a total of 36 years concurrently, but will serve 14 years for one of the rapes. It means he will spend the next seven years behind bars and seven years on licence.

“It was a brilliant sentence,” says Louise. “Even one month in prison as a child rapist is a massive deal, so to have seven years is life-changing.”

As for her family, there is seemingly no chance of Louise forgiving their actions in supporting her abuser over her.

She says: “I heard someone say my main goal was to bash the religion, as opposed to getting justice. That was never my goal.

“To my parents I would ask, religion aside, how could they not have supported their daughter after just the two charges he had admitted?

“I just don’t understand how they could have supported him to such a degree, especially when my mum was my best friend.”





Louise with mum Diane

Louise whispers: "I can never forgive them. That chapter of my life is closed. I have no family now.

"There is no way I would welcome them back into my life again. Knowing they have cast me out, despite knowing what he did, there is no way in the world I would have them back in my life. They have failed me too many times."

Louise thanked the “fantastic” witness support, police and legal teams who helped her win justice, but her biggest thanks was to the man who has now shown her what true love is.

Kevin was there for her every day in court and has supported his partner as she completes a college diploma.



Louise and sweetheart Kevin Tucker

Next month Louise applies for a university course to study applied criminology, which she hopes will help her secure a career helping other victims of abuse.

“Without the support of Kevin and my friends I would not have been able to move on,” she says. “They had faith in me when I didn’t have faith in myself.

“Kevin has made me realise what a real loving relationship can be like. He’s restored my faith in men.

“He writes me poems, he says that I was his missing jigsaw piece, and he is the most protective person. He just loves me unconditionally.

“Now, my goal is to help other victims, encourage them to come forward.

"Jehovah's Witnesses abhor child abuse, a crime that sadly occurs in all sectors of society. The safety of our children is of the utmost importance."

A Jehovah's Witnesses spokesman issued a statement to the Mail stating Richard Davenport was never a Jehovah's Witness and denying any suggestion of a cover up over the abuse.

It stated: "Jehovah's Witnesses abhor child abuse, a crime that sadly occurs in all sectors of society. The safety of our children is of the utmost importance.

"For decades, our journals The Watchtower and Awake!, as well as our website jw.org, have featured articles for both Jehovah's Witnesses and the general public on how to protect children from abuse.

"Jehovah's Witnesses do not separate children from their parents. We do not have any programmes, such as Sunday Schools, youth groups, or day care centres, in which we take custody of children from their parents.

"We believe that loving and protective parents are the best deterrent to child abuse. Thus, we continue to educate parents and provide them with valuable tools to help them educate and protect their children.

"We have no paid clergy. Congregation elders comply with child-abuse reporting laws. They provide abuse victims and their families with spiritual comfort from the Bible.

"The victim and his or her parents have the absolute right to report the matter to the governmental authorities.

"Congregation elders do not shield abusers from the authorities or from the consequences of their actions.

"Anyone who commits the sin of child abuse faces expulsion from the congregation. If such a person is serving in a position of responsibility, he is removed.

"Any suggestion that Jehovah's Witnesses cover up child abuse is absolutely false. We are committed to doing all we can to prevent child abuse and to provide spiritual comfort to any who have suffered from this terrible sin and crime."



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