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NEWS

# Girl who was abused by dad for five years asked Jehovah's Witnesses for help - but got molested by church elder too

Angie Rodgers, who has turned her back on the church, says she hopes that by telling her story she can help other victims



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BY GRACE MACASKILL

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Angie Rodgers says she was sexually assaulted by Harry Holt, just months after telling him about being abused by her dad (Photo: Sunday Mail)



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Terrified child Angie Rodgers covered under her duvet and prayed she would be spared.

For five years, from the age of 11, she would suffer at the hands of her perverted father.

Angie felt powerless as God-fearing [Jehovah's Witness](#) Ian Cousins [abused her](#) on an almost weekly basis, even when they were at a church convention.

She did finally pluck up the courage to tell church elders – only to be abused by one of them as well.

Harry Holt molested her as they watched Braveheart together. He went on to abuse seven other girls.

Angie says today: "I turned to the Church for help and I was abused a second time.

"I was a child and they should have helped, but they turned on me. They make me feel sick. I don't think I'll ever get over what happened. I've just learned to live with it.

"I have nightmares and flashbacks all the time and been diagnosed with post traumatic stress."

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**Angie says she was 11 when the abuse began** (Photo: Sunday Mirror)

Angie's dad was locked up for five years in 2002. But justice only caught up with Holt last year when he was jailed for assaults on eight children dating back four decades.

Now aged 36 and a mother of four, Angie waives her anonymity in a bid to help other abuse victims.

She says: "Dad did it whenever he got the chance, even when I was ill.

"It started one night when I was just 11. I woke to find him touching me in places a father should never touch his daughter.

"Once, I was throwing up with gastric flu when dad brought me home a fluffy bunny, with a peachy white floral dress and bloomers.

"My mum went to the Kingdom (church) and my dad scooped me up in his arms from the couch, took me to his room and molested me.

"I prayed my mum would come and save me but she never did. After that he used to try to touch me whenever we were alone. It got worse and worse.



**Harry Holt abused girls** (Photo: Sunday Mirror)

"We went to a Jehovah convention when I was about 14 and he tried to rape me in a tent. He was only interrupted when an elder shouted him from outside."

Angie was 15 when she confided in a pal whose father was a leader in a different congregation. Elders investigated and Cousins, now 55, was called to a "judicial meeting".

Angie was quizzed by three male elders including Holt, known as "Uncle Charlie" to children within the Kingdom Hall in Stevenston, Ayrshire. They asked intimate questions about where she was touched and how.

She explains: "They even asked what I'd been wearing, as if it was my fault. It was excruciating. I'd heard Bible stories about Lot having sex with his daughters and I was so confused I didn't know if it was right to have relations with my dad. I was so naive I was still playing with toys and Lego at 18."



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Angie said she was even attacked by her dad when she was unwell (Photo: Sunday Mirror)



**Now 36, she has turned her back on the church and started a new life with her partner and children** (Photo: Sunday Mirror)

Jehovah's Witnesses elders cannot act against suspects unless "there is a confession or two credible witnesses". Members can return to the same church if they show repentance for their sins.

And while elders admonished Cousins he was allowed to stay in the congregation – and the abuse stopped. But months later, in 1997, Holt pounced on Angie after they went door-knocking for members.

She says: "It wasn't unusual to go back to Holt's house for something to eat, but this time his wife was away.

"He put Braveheart on and soon after said he needed a wash. It got to the bit in the film when Murron gets her head chopped off when Harry came out of the shower and into the living room.

"He only had a towel wrapped around his waist. He asked me 'are you tickly' and tried to touch me.

"He then undid my coat and tried to tickle me again. I said I needed to go home because mum was waiting for me. I was so relieved to get out of there, but on the way home in the car he grabbed my leg and felt his way up towards my underwear."

and I was bullied at school. If I was caught with other kids my dad would hit me.

"I was scared of Dad. I thought if I told anyone about what happened I would bring reproach on Jehovah's 'good name'. I thought the elders were so powerful – above even police and social services.

"There was no question of any of the elders telling police either because everything is kept within the religion."



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**She finally opened up to the police about her father's abuse in 2000** (Photo: Sunday Mail)



**And four years later, she told of her abuse at the hands of Harry Holt, who was recently jailed for three-and-a-half-years** (Photo: Sunday Mail)

Angie finally found the strength to make a police complaint about her father in 2000 – when a second girl told officers she had been abused. He was convicted of indecent acts on Angie and two other girls. Angie turned her back on the Church at the age of 19 and began a new life.

But the religion encourages members to shun those who leave and Angie says her mum didn't speak to her for six years – and only saw her first two grandchildren when they were five and three.

By then Angie had put Holt's assault "to the back of my mind". But in 2014 another victim made a complaint and Angie agreed to speak up.

In February last year retired engineer Holt, 71, got three-and-a-half years at Kilmarnock Sheriff Court for abusing eight girls between 1971 and 2004. One was assaulted as he questioned her about the Bible and morality. He later officiated at her wedding.

Today Angie hopes her story will help other victims. She says: "If what happened to me helps just one young woman – or boy – go to the police it will have been worth it. What happened to me is horrendous but I'm trying to move on, otherwise my abusers have won. The religion is nothing but a cult. Children are kept silent by fears of Holy damnation and Armageddon if they bring the Church into ill repute.

"It's that fear and the fear of being shunned by friends and family if you leave that stops victims from reporting to police. It's archaic and it has to stop."

The Church refused to be drawn on specific details of Angie's case, saying meetings were confidential.

A statement said: "Jehovah's Witnesses abhor child abuse and view it as a heinous crime and sin. Safety of our children is of the utmost importance.

"Elders do not shield abusers from the authorities. Anyone who commits the sin of child abuse faces expulsion from the congregation. Any suggestion Jehovah's Witnesses cover up abuse is false.

"We are 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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