

Jehovah's Witness elder 'gave schoolgirl incredibly inappropriate topless massages'

Businessman Mark Sewell, 53, denies 12 sex charges against girls and women in a period spanning more than a decade

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Mark Sewell

A high-ranking Jehovah's Witness touched a schoolgirl's breasts as he massaged her, a court heard today.

Church elder Mark Sewell gave the girl a series of "incredibly inappropriate" topless massages when she was aged only 12 or 13, it was claimed.

On one occasion the girl's father interrupted a massage, with Sewell shouting "Put your top on!" at the youngster, jurors were told.

The businessman, 53, denies 12 sex charges against girls and women in a period spanning more than a decade.

In a video interview played to the jury at Merthyr Crown Court the woman, now in her 30s, alleged Sewell had given her massages "six or seven" times when she was aged 12 or 13.

The woman, a fellow member of the faith's Barry congregation, said churchgoers lived "in each other's pockets" at the time.

As a consequence there would often be large groups of people at Sewell's house in Porthkerry Road in the town for games of pool as well as music and food.

The woman, who cannot be identified for legal reasons, said: "He used to take me up to his bedroom where I used to take my top off and bra off so I was laid face-down at first on their double bed.

"He would stand over me and give me a massage."

Recounting the experience to a police officer in the interview she added: "I feel nervous now because I remember the feelings now."

She said she used to close her eyes for fear of seeing Sewell in the reflection of a large mirrored wardrobe in the bedroom he shared with wife Mary.

"He used to massage my back and my arms and often mentioned I was very tense.

"Now, looking back, of course I was tense - I didn't really like being massaged with no top on.

"Then he used to say to turn over. I used to say 'I don't want to turn over without a towel' as I was going through puberty, my little breasts were growing.

"He used to be reluctant to give me a towel. He used to pull my feet down the bed so I would move down the bed and the towel would move.

"I remember trying to grip it between my arms so it would stay in place. I did not want anything showing."

She added: "I just didn't like it. It wasn't right really."

During one of the alleged incidents, the woman said, she heard her father coming up the stairs.

"I remember panicking, my heart going, and him saying 'Put your top on, put your top on!'

"That's when I remember thinking, 'Ah, why doesn't he want my dad knowing?'"

She added: "If it was so innocent why did I have to quickly put my top on?"

The woman said she "could never really say no" to Sewell, who she described as "always quite a touchy-feely person" who would give open-mouthed kisses.

He "intimidated" her, she claimed.

Describing the alleged massages she said. "When he would come down the sides [of my body] his fingers would be around my breasts but not touching nipple or anything."

She told the police officer: "He did touch my breasts with his fingers when he came back down."

Marian Lewis, defending, asked the woman whether she had requested Sewell massage her.

"I don't remember asking to be taken to a bedroom half-naked to be massaged, no," the woman replied.

The woman's father, who cannot be identified, told the court Sewell was a "very obnoxious bully" and said it was "very dangerous" to confront him.

The man described an incident in which he claimed Sewell followed him in a car, revving the engine and shouting out of the window, as he walked away following a confrontation.

The man, wearing a short-sleeved white shirt with a pink tie and black trousers, also said he was "a bit disturbed" by the way Sewell would give "full-frontal" kisses to women.

The man's own wife was kissed on the lips by Sewell, he claimed.

"It was overt. It's not a normal thing to do."

Giving evidence to the four men and eight women of the jury, he also described the moment he allegedly walked in as Sewell gave his topless schoolgirl daughter a massage.

"Mark exclaimed 'What are you doing? Get out of here. Get out of here and close the door.'

"This made me very angry. He didn't had my permission to have my daughter in this situation."

The man added: "I could have seriously harmed Mark although he was much stronger than me."

The court had earlier heard how respected Jehovah's Witness Sewell used his "position of power" as an elder in the Barry congregation to "exploit and abuse" women and children for more than 10 years.

Between 1985 and 1995 Sewell is alleged to have abused two young girls and also raped a woman, all of whom were fellow Jehovah's Witnesses.

He is also accused of indecently assaulting another woman by rubbing his groin against her as she made a cup of tea.

Greying Sewell, wearing a grey suit over a grey shirt and diagonally-striped tie, listened on a hearing loop as he sat in the glass-fronted dock.

He denies 11 counts of indecent assault and a single count of rape.

The case, which is expected to last three weeks, continues.

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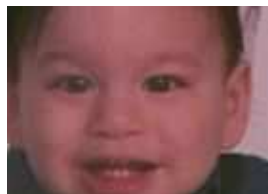
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