

Jehovah's Witness elder 'shredded' a woman's knickers before raping her, court hears

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Mark Sewell

A senior Jehovah's Witness "shredded" a woman's knickers before raping her, a court heard today.

Businessman Mark Sewell, 53, denies the rape allegation and a total of 11 other sex charges against girls and women over a 10-year period.

Today a video interview with the alleged rape victim was played to the court.

The woman, now in her 50s, claimed church elder Sewell would smash his house up during angry rows with wife Mary.

She also claimed the defendant would kiss her and flirt with her, and once even ripped off a bikini top she was wearing.

Wearing a black cardigan over a blue blouse and navy jeans, she told a female police officer coming forward had been "a long time coming".

She said: "It's something I did want to do 20-odd years ago but I just didn't have the courage to come forward back then.

"But I'm a stronger person now. I feel I've been a victim and I've not been treated very well by the organisation we were all part of, namely the Jehovah's Witnesses, and I just feel now is the time to tell my story."

The woman, who cannot be identified, said she and her family became close to Sewell and his family after joining the Barry congregation and would enjoy regular days out and trips together.

The jury at Merthyr Crown Court heard Sewell "changed" after having his wisdom teeth removed, with the woman saying they were told he was suffering with depression.

At this point he began "displaying strange behaviour", she said.

"Him and his wife started to have quite aggressive rows.

"She would call us at two o'clock in the morning and say he had smashed up the house, had been aggressive to her and the children and was doing things a religious person would not do."

On another occasion, the witness claimed, Sewell left his home with his children following a "hysterical" argument with his wife.

"About an hour later he rang from a public telephone box and said he had the children and if she didn't promise to do what he wanted she would never see them again."

The alleged victim claimed Sewell then "started to flirt" and "make innuendos" towards her, as well as kissing her.

"I saw this as somebody at the time needing some reassurance and comfort and really didn't think anything more of it.

"Then the innuendos became more sexually oriented. I used to look at him quizzically.

"He used to laugh it off as a joke. I never knew whether he was serious."

Sewell's behaviour then became "outrageous" on a trip, she said, giving an example of when the pair were swimming together.

"He approached me and, while I was swimming, ripped off my bikini top."

The incident left her in a "blind panic", she said.

"I remember shaking. I managed to get my top back on.

"I said, 'Why did you do it?'

"He just passed it off as a joke. From there it started to deteriorate."

Sewell would tell her he loved her and even suggest they should run away together, the jury heard.

"I became a counsellor to him, if you like, as well as a friend."

On one occasion in the early 1990s she and her husband were invited for a barbecue with the Sewells at their home in Porthkerry Road, Barry.

When they arrived the defendant's wife, Mary, was in tears in the front living room.

Sewell was in the back living room when the alleged victim went through to speak to him.

She said: "He was laid on the settee. I thought he had been crying as his eyes were quite red and bloodshot.

"I walked round to the settee that he was laying on stretched out."

The woman said she asked him: "What's the matter?"

Describing what happened next, she said: "He pulled me down. I went on to my knees in front of him.

"At eye level I asked again 'What's the matter Mark? What's it all about?'

"Very very quickly I was pushed on to my back.

"My underwear was ripped from me very quickly, very violently - it was one massive yank.

"I think I was saying to him 'What are you doing?'

"It was over in seconds. He laid on top of me, penetrated me. I would say it only lasted about 20 or 30 seconds.

"I was so shocked I couldn't let any sound out.

"I remember laying back looking at the ceiling to scream but nothing came out.

"I was so bewildered at how it could have happened so quickly.

"I just lay there for what seemed like ages. He just got back on the settee and went to sleep."

The attack left her underwear "shredded", the woman said.

The following day Sewell asked her to come to his house.

She said he "feigned ignorance" about what had happened but said he knew he had done something "really bad".

He claimed to have drunk a full bottle of whiskey before he attacked her, she said.

"He put his head in his hands and cried and then he got on his knees and begged my forgiveness," the woman said.

She added: "Because he seemed so plausible and so genuine - he seemed very, very remorseful - I did forgive him."

A few weeks later, the woman said, she discovered she was pregnant. When she informed Sewell, she claimed, he replied: "I hope you have a girl."

She later miscarried and added: "I thought that was a blessing in disguise really."

At a later date a teenage girl and fellow worshipper approached the woman and said Sewell had abused her when she was a child.

The girl, now a woman in her 30s, is the subject of seven charges denies by Sewell.

The woman said: "What went through my mind was the man who I thought was my friend was a paedophile and the man I thought had drunkenly raped me and thought it was a one-off after too much alcohol was probably a person that liked to touch people inappropriately, to fondle, to rape, whatever."

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 also alleged to have abused two young girls, both 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.

Sewell, wearing a grey suit with a blue shirt and yellow patterned tie, looked stony-faced 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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