

'Kiss me and I'll give you booze': Jehovah's Witness 'bribed' schoolgirl, hears court

Businessman Mark Sewell, 53, denies a dozen historic 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 "bribed" a schoolgirl to kiss him by offering her alcohol, a court heard today.

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

Today the first of Sewell's alleged victims - who was as young as 10 when she claims Sewell would kiss her on the lips and caress her back while wearing nothing but his underpants - told jurors at Merthyr Crown Court he would offer to give her alcohol in exchange for a kiss.

Prosecutor Sarah Waters asked what Sewell had used to "bribe" her.

Giving evidence live in court the woman, in her 30s, replied: "Generally it was alcohol. I remember he gave me a drink of vodka and orange to try and because I liked it he knew it was something I wasn't allowed to have as I was only young.

"He would say 'Give us a kiss.' If I didn't kiss him on the lips and with my tongue he would say 'No, give me a proper kiss'.

"Then I knew it meant he wanted me to kiss him with my tongue.

"After I would give him a kiss using my tongue, basically, he would let me have a drink [of vodka and orange]."

Wearing a checked dress and refusing to look towards the defendant as she gave her evidence, the woman added that she did not recall Sewell offering her anything else in exchange for a kiss.

The court yesterday 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.

Ms Waters told the jury of eight women and four men in her opening address: "He is a sexual predator that took opportunities available to him to satisfy his sexual desires."

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.

Heavily-built Sewell, wearing a grey suit with a mint green shirt and bright striped tie, looked like he had tears in his eyes as he sat alongside a security guard in the glass-fronted dock.

The defendant, of Porthkerry Road in Barry, denies 11 counts of indecent assault and a single count of rape.

None of the four alleged victims can be identified for legal reasons.

The jury were later shown a document written by the alleged victim in the early 1990s when she was in her late teens.

The typed document begins: "This journal is designed to help me remember exactly what happened to me between the ages of 12 and 14."

It says to "start at the beginning seems almost impossible" and adds: "It just seems that the abuse was something that has always happened - there was no start to it, it was just there."

The numbered paragraphs outline allegations of abuse by Sewell, including that he pulled the alleged victim on top of him and also kissed her.

One section said Sewell would tell the girl she "owed" him kisses for things and he would sometimes ask for "proper kisses".

It said: "This is not even just a kiss on the lips. It is a kiss with his mouth open and using his tongue.

"If I owed him 10 kisses I could either give him 10 kisses or a couple of proper kisses.

"If I had kissed him he would say whether it was good enough or not.

"If not I would have to do it better."

Marian Lewis, defending, asked the victim: "Mr Sewell has never inserted his tongue into your mouth has he?"

She replied: "Yes he has."

Ms Lewis then claimed the document was written because the victim didn't like fellow churchgoer and family friend Sewell.

The woman said: "It's not that I didn't like him.

"I loved him - worshipped him in fact.

"I didn't like what he did to me but I loved him."

The document also claims Sewell pushed his fingers into the alleged victim's mouth when she was a child.

She thought this was "stupid" at the time but after later seeing a Robert de Niro film when it was "done in a sort of romantic way" she "was nearly sick".

The document added: "Actually I wouldn't call it romantic - the way Mark did it I would call perverted."

Towards the end of the note the woman recounts an episode where she wept and told Sewell she "didn't want him to come near me any more".

She wrote: "At this point he told me it was all my fault for kissing him in the first place and that my mum and dad would know it was my fault."

The woman told the court Sewell had convinced her parents she was "misunderstanding" him.

"He was a respected elder within the Jehovah's Witnesses so it was easy for him to convince people that I was just being silly and was misunderstanding him."

She added: "That was the word he chose to use as if I was some sort of idiot."

In the document the alleged victim claims she is "sure" Sewell knows he "that he did something wrong".

She added: "Deep down inside I know what his intentions were and I dread to think what may have happened if I didn't tell my mum and dad when I did."

He was responsible for "wrecking" her teenage years, according to the document.

She wrote: "Punishment to Mark does not even seem appropriate any more.

"I feel I'm the one who has been punished - I have suffered ever since."

The victim later told the court she had been visited at home by three church elders after she had told her parents about Sewell's alleged abuse in greater detail when she was a little older.

An "investigating committee" of two elders presided over a meeting between the victim and her father with Sewell and his wife Mary, during which the alleged victim's claims were denied.

Ms Lewis, defending, said: "As a result of that meeting nothing else happened."

The alleged victim said that was "not strictly true" and she was "one of many at the time having meetings" about Sewell.

"After my meeting it was then a waiting game while other victims were interviewed," she added.

Ms Lewis replied: "Not true. There were no allegations at that time."

But the woman told the court: "There were at least eight other women who had gone to the elders at that time with similar complaints and they were all dealt with in one go."

The alleged victim also told the court she had spoken to a solicitor when she was 19 about her claims but after the solicitor wrote to Sewell he wrote back saying he was bankrupt.

She added: "All I've ever wanted is for him to admit what he did and say sorry."

The case was later adjourned until tomorrow.

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