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Maryville man seeks awareness of sexual abuse within Jehovah's Witnesses

Katie Forrester | Daily Times Correspondent

Charlie Jones was just 8 years old when he was the victim of sexual abuse by a family friend. It happened when his parents left him, his sister and a friend with their "brother" in the Jehovah's Witnesses a few times.

"He'd take me to the other room and molest me back there," Jones said. This abuse happened on at least two occasions that Jones can remember, and each time the other two children were told that Jones had misbehaved and was about to receive punishment.



DARYL SULLIVAN | THE DAILY TIMES
Charlie Jones, of Maryville, talks about child molestation and an organization called Silent Lambs that helps victims of abuse.

ON THE NET

• <http://silentlambs.org>

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Jones said that on one occasion his mother came back and the man cleaned him up and told his mother that he was punished for misbehaving to explain why Jones was crying. Jones said that he was punished by his unknowing mother on the way home for not behaving as he should have.

Parents didn't know

"The issue was that my parents did not know he was a predator," Jones said.

According to Jones, a major factor in cases such as his within the Jehovah's Witnesses is the secrecy policy. Jones said that the written rule for bringing to light cases of sexual abuse states that for any accusation you must have two or more witnesses, including the victim. If both witnesses were victims of different attacks by the same person, then those testimonies would suffice as two witnesses.

The precedence given for that rule was based on the Old Testament, and once allegations are taken to the elders who serve as church leaders, they cannot be discussed in the congregation or otherwise. Jones said that coming forth to any other person is punishable by "disfellowshipping," which is sort of a "social death."

Those who have been disfellowshipped are shunned by even family, and are no longer members of the church. After a case is taken to the elders, the elders will confront the accused, and if the accused denies the allegations, the elders will confront the accused in front of the victim.

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According to Jones, should the accused still deny misconduct, the elders will tell the victim that they are not to speak of the incident to anyone.

"When something like this happens, you automatically lose everything you know," he said.

On a mission

Jones also said that because the Jehovah's Witnesses are so inclusive that the risk of having pedophiles within the congregation is high. "It's automatic that you trust each other, which is why it's even more important that this information is spread out. They automatically trust any witness they meet. That's their only choice," Jones said.

"I wasn't silenced in the traditional manner that most kids were," Jones said, "I knew if I went about telling about this, I would lose my family and lose my friends. Because they (the elders) side with the congregation, not the victim, you lose friends, family, everything you know in one day."

Now Jones, a Maryville resident, is on a mission to make people aware of sexual abuse within the organization.

"What I've done is involved myself in the Silent Lambs," Jones said. The Silent Lambs is an organization founded by a former Jehovah's Witnesses elder, Bill Bowan, that is designed to give support to abuse victims within the Jehovah's Witnesses. "It's tough for Bill because he has to hear these horror stories on a daily basis," Jones said.

Bowan used to be an elder in a Kentucky chapter of the Jehovah's Witnesses. "I was a part of the organization for 43 years of my life," Bowan said in a phone interview.

While he was an elder, Bowan was asked to clean out some of the congregation's older files. "I discovered that a fellow elder in my church was a confessed child molester," Bowan said.

Bowan attempted to have this elder removed from his position for one year and even found evidence that the elder had currently been molesting another child. After contacting the Jehovah's Witnesses legal department, Bowan said he was advised to leave the matter alone.

Bowan wrote about his endeavors online and victims began to contact him with their stories and Silent Lambs was created.

"Silent Lambs has been in existence for 12 years. I founded Silent Lambs basically to give victims a voice," Bowan said. Now Bowan has been disfellowshipped and is shunned even by close family.

Bowan said that he has spoken with at least 7,000 victims over the years. "There's multiple, multiple cases of children being molested and then it's covered up by church policies," Bowan said.

"The Silent Lambs is not an anti-Jehovah's Witnesses organization," Bowan said, "My purpose is not to make people leave the Jehovah's Witnesses."

Bowan said the Silent Lambs's true goal is to provide awareness to Jehovah's Witness members of pedophiles who are within congregations so that children may be protected. In short, the secrecy policy is the cause of contention. Of those who prey on children within the Jehovah's Witnesses, Bowan said, "They are using the trust of the organization to do it."

Action in courts

Bowan said he has contacts within Bethel, the Jehovah's Witnesses world headquarters. These contacts have provided him with information from a database that the Jehovah's Witnesses have compiled of known sex offenders within the congregations. According to Bowan, as of 2002, that list is up to 23,720 confessed offenders or cases where there were two or more witnesses.

Bowan also said that the Silent Lambs has had some recent success with lawsuits against the Jehovah's Witnesses. In 2011 Candace Conti, with the help of the Silent Lambs, of Oakland, Calif., sued the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, the North Fremont Congregation and Jonathan Kendrick. Conti alleged that Kendrick sexually abused her as a child, and the Watchtower's secrecy policy prevented any member of the congregation from being warned of his offenses.

The Alameda County Superior Court awarded Conti a total of \$28 million in damages. The Watchtower's press release about the Candace Conti case states



that the organization will try to appeal the court's decision on grounds that a sentence made against a corporation because of the actions of a member of the organization is unprecedented.

The local Kingdom Hall was contacted by The Daily Times, but did not wish to comment.

"In my opinion, in my experience, Candace is just the tip of the iceberg," Bowan said. He also said that the lawsuit was "like pushing a boulder up a big hill." The fervor will continue for members of the Silent Lambs. Jones leaves flyers for the Silent Lambs at local Kingdom Halls as part of his fight, and Bowan continues talking to victims on a daily basis.

Now that this trial is done, the Silent Lambs will continue to fight, and they will remain an outlet for those who have stories to share.

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Suzi Drums · Huntington Beach, California

I had been a Jehovah's witness for 35 years when I became aware of this issue. Like most witnesses, I had complete trust in my spiritual brothers and sisters and the organization that claims to be the only conduit of truth between God and man. It took me some months after researching what had come to my attention via Dateline. When you're a JW, you can't let anyone else know you have some problems with things going on inside the organization. Bill Bowen's SilentLambs.org site brought to light so much of the culpability of the Watchtower Society it gave me a focal point to start from. It also pointed me toward links to so much more information on other things that the Watchtower has done to destroy people's lives over the past decades. Charlie is not alone as an abuse victim. Though not a victim myself, I have come to know the stories of other witnesses who have quit or been thrown out (disfellowshipped). Abuse and rape victims are blamed for what happened to them. Good on Charlie Jones to speak up. Good on Bill Bowen for all the work he has done.

Reply · 18 · [Jke](#) · Yesterday at 2:49am



Brenda Lee · Can't tell ya

Ask yourself, how many of these "nice" and "Christian" Jehovah's Witnesses are coming to your door--perhaps sizing up your child? The next time you are visited by Jehovah's Witnesses, don't just say, "I'm not interested." Ask, "Why does your organization defend pedophiles?" Because this isn't just one isolated case. There are thousands just like this one out there and there will continue to be children victimized until people aren't afraid to question the practices of the Watchtower organization's two-witness requirement. Email me through my website below and I'll send you some newsletters which highlight some of the abusive practices dished out by Jehovah's Witnesses. Brenda Lee, "Out of the Cocoon: A Young Woman's Courageous Flight from the Grip of a Religious Cult" www.outofthecocoon.net

Reply · 16 · [Jke](#) · Yesterday at 8:39am



Michelle Spratt

Wow...this hits close to home. Maryville, TN is less than an hour from where I live.

Reply · 1 · [Jke](#) · Yesterday at 10:36am



Brenda Lee · Can't tell ya

A while ago Charlie sent me a pic and I shared it with my newsletters readers. It was so touching, I'm going to include it on my wall (see above).

Reply · 1 · [Jke](#) · Yesterday at 11:01am



Shanna Palmer

Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on view point jw's don't knock on my door much, I do educate with questions hoping to plant seeds, for future thought and freedom.

Reply · 3 · [Jke](#) · Yesterday at 1:23pm

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Danny Haszard · Top Commenter · IMI www.dannyhaszard.com at Jehovah's Witness cult educator

Jehovah's Witnesses hit with \$28 million sex abuse settlement Oakland, Calif. - Google it.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have a policy within their religion that protects pedophiles.

The official policy is that the elders of the "Church" are supposed to handle the matter internally, without contacting the police. They do this



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