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The Justice Coalition's

Victims' Advocate

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Innocence betrayed...

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lock the bedroom door and force himself on her, holding his hand over her mouth to stifle her screams. If she did make a sound, he would beat her, then resume his attack. When she vomited on him while he tried to make her perform oral sex, he beat her then turned her over and raped her anally again.

Listening to Leah, now 28, describe her unspeakable experience was almost more than I could stand. How on earth had that child borne such agony? She wept despairingly as she recounted the years of abuse. How she begged her mother not to make her go next door, even getting under the car and holding on to it until Lester, reproaching her mother about Leah's willfulness, dragged her out and spanked her then took her to his house.

When she was almost 12 years old she finally told her mother that he had touched her inappropriately but did not give any details and, as Lester had predicted, her mother, not understanding all that had transpired, did not believe her. Only since we began writing this story did Leah finally disclose to her parents the full extent of her years of torture.

Sexual abuse: a heinous crime

Normal people cannot begin to comprehend how someone can gain satisfaction from inflicting such pain on another, how an adult can find pleasure in performing sex acts with a child. But more and more often we hear about the awful exploitation of innocent children as men seek to satisfy their brutish lusts.

Leah's story (told only in part) is at the severe, extreme end of the sexual molestation spectrum; however, sexual abuse is defined as "any sexual contact between a child and another person from fondling to rape, with or without force."

The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse states, "It is a heinous crime for which there is no excuse nor should there be any tolerance. It has a direct and potentially permanent impact on the victim's self-esteem. Few victims enter adulthood without symptoms of the crime perpetrated against them as children; unfortunately, they have difficulty understanding that it is always the offender that is 100 percent responsible for child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse is NEVER, not in whole or in part, the victim's fault.

Informed consent is not possible at that age."

The NCCA cites the incredible statistics that "one girl in four is sexually abused before the age of 18; for boys, the odds are one in eight. The average age of child sexual abuse is 11, although some psychopaths strike upon children much younger."

Predators in unlikely places

I admit being skeptical when I first heard those statistics. I couldn't imagine that any of the people I knew would be either the victim or the perpetrator of such an evil deed. But when I began talking to friends about this predator edition of the *Victims' Advocate*, I was amazed to find that, almost without exception, every one had a story to tell about his/her own experience with this sordid crime.

While giving a luncheon speech a few months ago, Ted Hires, Sr., who founded the Justice Coalition, commented that he had been molested as a child. Partly as a result of this disclosure (and the publicity about predator priests), a local minister who said I could use his

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