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Jehovah's Witness jailed for sexually motivated attacks on girls

A Jehovah's Witness who got sexual kicks from strangling young girls went unpunished for years – after his activities were covered up by the congregation at the Warwick church he attended.

But perverted Ian Pheasey's sordid past finally caught up with him when one of his victims bravely went to the police after becoming concerned over him getting a job at a hospice.

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By Court reporter
December 24, 2015 at 11:11 am

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He was jailed for five years after pleading guilty at Warwick Crown Court to assaulting one girl causing her actual bodily harm and two of indecently assaulting other girls.

Pheasey (54) of Langcliffe Avenue, Warwick, was also ordered to register as a sex offender for life and given a sexual harm prevention order restricting his contact with children.

Prosecutor Nicholas Taplow said: "He was a man who had a particular sexual fascination with the act of strangulation, which features in two of the three counts.

"He derived sexual gratification from strangling children, and many children were strangled in this way by him during what he described as 'horseplay.'"

The offences Pheasey admitted date back to the 1990s when he was a member of the congregation at the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Woodloes area of Warwick.

And his first victim was even attacked in the Kingdom Hall library, where Pheasey was the librarian at the time, when the seven-year-old girl went there to get a book.

Pheasey closed the door behind her, and as she reached for the book he grabbed her round the neck, strangling her so she could not breathe, until she managed to wriggle free and run out.

Judge Richard Griffith-Jones observed: "This, according to the defendant, is done for sexual gratification, even though it's charged as assault."

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The girl was too frightened of Pheasey to tell anyone – and his actions may have gone undiscovered if it was not for his second victim's subsequent complaint.

That girl was 14 at the time, and when Pheasey saw her while he was doing some work for an elderly woman who lived near her home, he called her over, and she went, said Mr Tatlow.

"He grabbed her round the neck and dragged her into the house and threw her to the kitchen floor where he straddled her and squeezed her neck as she struggled to breath."

The girl fell into unconsciousness, came round but then passed out again before coming round for a second time and crying out: "Jehovah help me!"

Her trousers had been partly pulled down and she was in pain and bleeding – but Pheasey entered his plea on the basis that he had not penetrated her during the incident.

He let go of her, but as she got up he calmly told her that if she told anyone, he would kill her, chillingly adding that if she grew up and had girls children he would rape them.

She ran home screaming and crying and told her mother what had happened – only to be told to clean herself up before she was taken to hospital for the bruising to her neck to be treated.

"Sadly her parents chose to conceal the sexual nature of the incident and told her not to say anything about it. They continued to understate the seriousness of the assault, and the matter was swept under the carpet by the church."

Over the years that victim was badly affected by what had happened, suffering flashbacks and night terrors over it, and her religious faith was undermined.

She feels anger towards her parents and towards the congregation for not dealing with it properly, but felt unable to speak out – until she became concerned on learning in 2014 that Pheasey had got a job at a hospice.

Pheasey's third victim was just six when he was carrying out some work at her parents' home; and as she sat in his van, he got in and began to tickle her before moving his hand up under her skirt – but stopped when she kicked out and screamed.

Following his arrest Pheasey said he could not remember the incident in the library, but accepted he had put his hands round that girl's neck on more than one occasion.

He admitted he had fantasised about strangling the 14-year-old, and had lured her over with the intention of strangling her and becoming sexually aroused.

Nick Devine, defending, said: "The inevitable lengthy sentence of imprisonment will have devastating consequences for him, going to prison at his age for an offence of this nature.

"It may be that, while the congregation of the Jehovah's Witnesses can be criticised for how they dealt with it, it has at least acted on him in part to prevent a return to acting out the fantasies he had."

Jailing Pheasey, Judge Griffith-Jones told him: "You obtain sexual gratification from the idea of strangling children. That is a hideous and discomfiting fantasy, and one which has given me some concern when I come to sentence you.

"One of the most serious features is that strangulation creates a risk of causing very serious injury and death.

"So it's not simply a matter of it being frightening and disgusting that small children have been made to suffer in this way, it's the risk they would suffer something even more catastrophic."

Of the 14-year-old victim, he said: "She must have been absolutely petrified. I'm satisfied you started to undo her clothing, but I sentence you on the basis that you did not defile her body.

"She was entitled to support and comfort which could only properly be exercised by this matter being reported to the police.

"Sadly, when she told her parents their priorities were entirely misplaced. As a result of their failures and of those around her, she has had to bear this terrible memory."

After jailing Pheasey, Judge Griffith-Jones praised the courage of that victim in coming forward 'not to help herself, but because she was anxious that others should be protected.'

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