

## A MOTHER'S REMORSE

This is the story of my daughter's abuse when she was just a young child. I speak on her behalf, in hopes to help other parents "know what to do" if a similar situation was to arise with their own child/ren and to hopefully help people to learn from my own mistakes in dealing with the serious issue of Child Sexual Abuse.

My daughter (I shall call her Caitlyn for the purpose of this story) was born into a partially professing family – myself professing and her father – although raised in a professing home and always attended meetings – had never professed himself.

Her father (we shall call Peter for the purpose of this story) had never been a man to show much emotion. He drank approximately 2-3 cartons of beer each week, and smoked marijuana on a regular basis (4 out of 7 nights per week). The relationship between Caitlyn's father and I had deteriorated throughout the first 12 months of Caitlyn's life – and by the time she reached 18 months of age – it had deteriorated to the point of virtually no communication and we were living separate lives – albeit under the same roof. Peter was a man with very unusually painful sexual habits and was never content with just "traditional sex". This caused me great discomfort, and often times pain, and in hindsight was not healthy for a marital relationship under any terms.

The emotional abuse on Caitlyn from her father started at around 6 months of age. He would rarely pick her up let alone cuddle her and would often nudge her out of the way with his foot when she came too close or was in his walk way. He reiterated often that he didn't love either of us and would not participate in any family/fatherly activity with her. Even if she was crying and had her arms stretched out to him – it did not affect him and he would continue to avoid her.

Throughout the marriage, Peter kept his money to himself. He would occasionally go and buy some groceries and food – generally "munchie" food for his marijuana cravings. My mother would often notice that Caitlyn and I had no fresh food in the house and so would take us shopping to get some fruit and vegies for which I am ever so grateful. Otherwise we would depend on my social security money to come through fortnightly so that we could buy the bare essentials as we afforded them.

The second time I became pregnant – I told him of the pregnancy when I was just 8 weeks along. He responded in anger by kicking me in the stomach which over the course of the following 12 hours caused me to bleed and miscarry. It was at this time that I was hospitalised and with help of a doctor, I put a plan of action in place to leave Peter – and over the following few months I gathered together some money, a job and a place to live. We moved out of the marital home just after Caitlyn's second birthday.

Having been brought up in such manner to value family and family relationships... I wanted to instil this in my daughter too. My belief at that point was that it was important for Caitlyn to continue to see Peter and to keep trying to have some sort of father/daughter relationship with them. When I was growing up myself – I didn't see my father much but I did appreciate the time I could spend with him.

So 3 weeks after I left Peter – and I had not heard from him – I contacted him to initiate contact visits between him and Caitlyn. Although he wasn't too excited about it himself – he acknowledged that his own parents would like to see her – so he would take her once a week or fortnight – for the night. He would collect her from daycare – and return her there the following morning. Peter's parents seemed to be quite loving and affectionate with Caitlyn, so I was happy that this was going to be happening.

The first week that Caitlyn was collected by Peter at daycare – there was no issue and the visit went well. The second time that contact occurred – Peter collected Caitlyn from daycare – and returned her the following morning in the same nappy that she had been collect in. The daycare staff were quite appalled and brought this up with me. The third time that he was to collect Caitlyn, she became distressed just at the site of him. The staff let her go with him – but told me of this the following day.

One night approximately 4 weeks after the start of these contact visits, I had Caitlyn at home with me and we were playing blocks on the lounge room. We were quite happily building towers with the blocks when all of a sudden she burst into tears and told me that daddy hurt her wee-wee and she started clutching her private parts with her hand. I had absolutely no idea on what could have happened and hastily brushed it off thinking that she might have had thrush and it hurt when he wiped her bottom. I did check her bottom the next time I changed her – and whilst it was red (indicative of thrush in my mind too), I couldn't see any “trauma” to the site. I allowed visitations to continue and did not continue the conversation with Caitlyn other than to soothe her saying, “It's ok darling – everything will be ok”. She calmed down relatively easily and our conversation was able to be diverted back to play.

The following week – Caitlyn went and stayed at my parent's house. While she was there at my parents that she told my mother that “Daddy hurt my wee-wee and it hurts, Grandma!”. Mum thought that was a bit odd and brought it up with me. Having had a similar instance the week before – I again brushed off any concern thinking it must still be thrush and I took her to the doctor to get some cream.

The very next visitation was a long weekend and Peter's parents asked me if Peter could bring Caitlyn with them away to a beach holiday unit. I agreed and Caitlyn seemed to leave with his parents quite happily. Upon her return 2 nights later – things were very different. Caitlyn was quite withdrawn and seemed easily upset. As soon as Peter left, she started crying and said “no more daddy mummy. I love you mummy.” I couldn't quite understand what she was trying to say as she was still only 2 years of age.

At the dinner table when I sat her down to eat, she started screaming and crying that her wee-wee was sore. She was clutching her privates and bent over – so I grew very concerned very quickly. I had a quick glance in her nappy and noticed that she was very red around her privates and her vagina area was a little stretched and weeping with some fluid. She had a strange smell to her too. I took her to the local doctors immediately. Caitlyn told the doctor before he was able to examine her that her daddy had hurt her wee-wee. He immediately told me to go straight up to the hospital as if there was a chance that she had been sexually abused – he was not allowed to examine her – only a trained paediatrician was allowed to do that. I took her to the

Mater Childrens hospital where I was directed to the Child Protection Unit within the same hospital.

The lady at the CPU put me in touch with the Juvenile Aide Bureau department of the police and they said to take her home and they would see me alone the following day to organise a paediatrician appointment. In the following days, Caitlyn continued as normal – only occasionally making statements about her private parts. At one point she made the statement, “Daddy’s wee-wee is nice and big” which again was a concern to me. Why would a child of 2 years old be making these statements unless it had actually happened and made an impact on her?

I put Caitlyn into daycare again as normal that day and proceeded to the police station to report to them what Caitlyn had been saying and how she had been behaving. They rang the paediatrician and made an appointment – 6 weeks away! In hindsight I knew I should have insisted on some evidence being taken immediately. Photos, her nappy taken for any possible DNA (the smell may have been semen – I was a bit naïve in that department at that stage!)... and any evidence to be collected should have been collected that day.

That very same day when Caitlyn went to daycare she made disclosures to her teachers that “Daddy hurt my wee-wee and it really hurt”. They asked her what happened and she put her hand down to her privates and made a “scrunching” action with her fist against herself. Again she was quite upset. This wasn’t reported to me at the time – but they did report directly to the Child Protection officers who then shared that information with the Juvenile Aide Bureau.

In the following days, Caitlyn continued as normal – only occasionally making statements about her private parts.

I was advised by the JAB to cease unsupervised visitation immediately and contact a lawyer in regards to Caitlyn’s protection. I did so immediately. The same day I rang Peter looking for a possible innocent explanation as to why our daughter would be saying all of these things to myself, my mother and the school teachers. I asked him “did you sit her down too hard in the bath? Wipe her bottom a bit rough when changing her nappy? Bounce her on your knee?”. His reponse was that he had never had to bathe her – his mother did that... he had never changed her nappy and certainly hadn’t had any rough play with her involving her bottom or being bounced. Peter’s parents started making allegations that I was either coaching my daughter or that Caitlyn was making stories up. Both were untrue. Through the strength of God I was able to get through these allegations and endure what was to come.

The ensuing investigation was a nightmare in my opinion. The lawyers and family court became involved – and the court put into place a supervised visitation plan for Peter and Caitlyn to remain in contact. Out of 9 visits to the contact centre – Peter only showed up 3 times. Each time, Caitlyn was a little uncomfortable but “came around” to him after encouragement of the supervisor. She still cried at nights about her daddy hurting her wee-wee and bottom... but these sessions over time became less and less. Upon receiving legal advice from the courts – it was agreed that it was best to not talk to or encourage Caitlyn to continue talking about it. This was to at

least give her a chance to try and forget some of the atrocities. I have abided by this advice to this day.

It was during these 6 weeks of waiting for the paediatrician that I was paid a visit from 2 lovely sister workers. I had stopped going to meetings for approximately 8-10 months at that stage. I explained to the workers the situation I was in and was told by them, "It really isn't necessary to be going to all that trouble to get the police involved... these sorts of situation can be best dealt within the family". I was a bit confused by this advice...and am glad now that I didn't take it. I kept praying to God to help me through this whole complicated mess and to give me strength to do what was right by my daughter and by the laws of the land.

The paediatrician visit came up – and by that time the redness had subsided and she was looking back to normal in her private areas (just my opinion from changing her nappy myself). The paediatrician had to report that the findings were "inconclusive" although there were substantial fissures around her anus. This was not enough evidence for the police to charge Peter. They decided to interview him instead. At the interview between Peter and police, he made several disclaimers about me being unstable and that I had a personality disorder. He emphatically denied "sexually abusing anyone".

Upon the courts hearing of the "personality disorder" allegation – they sent both Peter and myself for individual psychiatric assessment. The reports from this assessment were made available to both parties – it was interesting to note that the psychiatrist said that there was no indication of the mother (myself) having any personality disorders and in his expert opinion believed that I was acting as a concerned parent should be and was doing everything to ensure the protection of my daughter. On the other hand, the psychiatrist made the observation that Peter seemed to be suffering from Schizoid Personality Disorder. The definition of Schizoid Personality Disorder in my opinion absolutely describes Peter's personality 100%.

After this time, Peter ceased attending any court sessions. A trial date was set – but Peter again did not turn up for the court hearing. Sole custody was awarded to myself and the judge made the comments that it was apparent that the father was having psychological difficulties and was anything but a stable or safe influence in his daughters life. He gave Peter 3 months to appeal or re-list the matter and then closed the case satisfied that no matter what had happened – Caitlyn would be safe from her father.

Caitlyn continued to be afraid of men that had the same stature as her biological father – and still continued to cry at night because of some of the experiences that she could remember. Gradually over time this has lessened. Immediately after the court hearings ceased – I took her to see a child psychologist to receive child psychotherapy. This helped Caitlyn immensely. They used a type of therapy on her to help her think more positively so that she wouldn't continue to break down and cry whenever she had word associations with her father, or saw men of similar stature. It worked quite well in my opinion and to this day she is growing into such a beautiful, good natured little girl, and with God's strength and love she will continue to do so.

I urge other parents to listen to their children and be aware that little children DO NOT make these allegations up! Do everything you can to protect and love your children – they are only children for such a short time and deserve all the love that we can possibly give to them.

Anon3