

When I was 16 I was sexually molested by Steve Korch. At the time I lived in Anaheim, CA. This is my story.

I met Steve when I began attending Covenant Presbyterian Church in Orange, CA in early March 1975. He was the youth pastor and the instant I met him and his wife Ruthie I liked them very much. Steve was full of energy, very charismatic and enthusiastic. I was not yet a Christian and I began attending his Wednesday night Bible studies and joined the church youth group on outings such as a night at a roller-skating rink and a day trip up to the mountains to enjoy the snow.

I had a lot of questions about God and after Bible study Steve would talk with me in his office which was located in a trailer. It was private; the main church office was located in another trailer which was perpendicular to Steve's. He always took his time with me and patiently answered all my questions, always seeking to lead me to the Lord. I learned he would soon graduate from Biola and that he had been at Covenant for about two years on a part-time basis. I also learned that he and Ruthie had been married a little over two years.

Before I began attending church I was a very depressed young girl. In my sophomore year of high school I found a mentor in my English teacher and he was always there for me when I needed to talk to someone. But during my junior year he went away for a year to Stanford and I bottled everything up inside. So I was really hurting and needing to talk to someone by the time I met Steve in the Spring of my junior year.

One Sunday night after the weekly youth group fellowship, Steve and Ruthie gave me a ride home in their red Volkswagon. I clearly remember how they beseeched me to give my life to Christ, how they said to me that Jesus was coming back soon and if I didn't go with them it would just break their hearts. I remember them telling me they were praying for me and how I thought to myself no one had ever told me that before.

When I became a Christian on March 22, 1975 both Steve and Ruthie were thrilled. They were so delighted that they took me out two days later for an all-day celebration. It was Spring break and we went to Maranatha Village, a Christian bookstore/gift shop and down to Balboa Island and out to lunch. On that day Steve gave me his copy of the book "Hind's Feet on High Places" which I still have. I also still have a thank you note that Ruthie wrote to me for some coffee mugs I gave them. In a short period of time they were becoming very special people to me.

Because I was still grappling with issues that troubled me and also because I was a brand-new Christian and still had lots of questions, Steve began spending time counseling me in his office. At last I had found someone I felt I could trust, someone who took the place of my teacher friend who was away. When I wrote to my teacher friend I told him about Steve and Ruthie in detail. He gave my letters back to me when he returned from Stanford, and I still have them.

In one letter to him I wrote, “One day as Steve and I were talking, I was having a hard time telling him exactly what was happening inside. Finally he suggested that if I could not say it, I should try writing it. I thought of you, my fear of writing for you, yet for some reason I did it. The next day when I was very deep into myself, I started writing. The end result was eight pages of thoughts I was much afraid to part with, but I knew I *had* to do it. Steve has accepted me for what I am and I was very thankful he understood my writing. He asked me if I would write for him whenever I felt the need *to* write. I said yes, I would share with him.”

And that’s exactly how I felt – like Steve accepted me. I felt he understood me. And always, *always* I felt he was someone I could trust. But one day that would change. It started with a kiss.

In early April 1975 one night after Bible study, Steve kissed me when we were alone in his office. I had never been kissed. I had no idea what it felt like to be kissed. I was stunned he was kissing me. He was *married*. He was 25 years old. I was a sexually naïve, sexually immature 16-year-old. I knew it was wrong. But I didn’t tell anyone. Except for a small hint to my teacher friend in a letter when I wrote, “Steve and I have grown very close to one another. Somehow I know it is not entirely right.”

The next time Steve and I met in his office for counseling was a week after he’d kissed me. Eventually he began kissing me again. I didn’t stop him. I thought I was special. I thought he must be attracted to me if he was kissing me, and no one had ever shown me that kind of attention before. I know now that was a normal reaction for a young girl in my situation. But after awhile he started doing more than kissing me. He began touching my breasts. I was shocked. But I was too terrified to stop him. He just kept kissing me and gradually his hand moved down to my pants. He unzipped my pants and put his fingers inside my vagina. It hurt; I was a virgin. I didn’t know what to do. He began moving his fingers in and out of my vagina while he continued kissing me. I was too afraid to stop him, to tell him he was hurting me, that he shouldn’t be doing that to me. And so he just kept doing it.

I still never told anyone. But I kept a diary at the time and I wrote in the diary about what Steve was doing to me. I still had it in my head that I must be special. I began to think that maybe when I met with Steve for counseling he would simply kiss me to show me I was special. I would think I don’t want him to do the other stuff because it hurts and I would hope that maybe he would just kiss me instead. But the molesting continued on several more occasions. And I wrote about it in my diary.

One day I looked at Steve and I said “you have Ruthie. *Why???*” I remember the look on Steve’s face when he answered “I don’t know”. A look that seemed to say he truly didn’t understand why he was hurting this young girl who trusted him.

I don’t remember Steve ever saying to me that this was our secret and that I should not tell anyone what was happening. I think he knew that I wasn’t going to tell anyone.

The thing that scared me the most was a question Steve posed to me one day. I had shared with him how I always wanted to have something to look forward to. And one time when he was molesting me he stopped for a minute and looked at me and said, "something to look forward to??" I was stunned. I remember just looking at him and something clicked in my brain, *this is so wrong!!* To me he was implying the things that he was doing to me were something for me to look forward to. And still I told no one.

One day after Steve had locked the door to his office, someone came and tried to open it. If the door had not been locked they would have caught Steve in the act. I remember the alarm on his face when he heard someone try to come in; he must have realized how close he came to being caught. I remember it was a guy in the youth group named Bob. But I never knew if he ever said anything to anyone about the door being locked.

On Monday, May 5, 1975 I took the bus to the church. Steve worked on Monday and Wednesday afternoons and I went to talk to him after I got home from school. When I got there that day I gave Steve several pages I had written of my thoughts and feelings. Despite the fact he was sexually abusing me, I was still thinking he wanted me to share with him.

On that date Steve eventually went further than he ever had before. For the first time he took out his erect penis and he put it right next to my vagina. He said something about just wanting to hold it there. I remember feeling very nervous. I didn't know what he was thinking. I didn't know what to do. But then he suddenly sent me away. He said he had work to do and instead of giving me a ride home like he usually did, I was going to have to take the bus home. I remember feeling like I was just being discarded like a piece of trash. I clearly remember and can picture me sitting in the corner on the floor of his trailer and begging him to let me stay and sit quietly while he did his work. I had thought I was special to him and now I was feeling like he had just used me. It was a terrible feeling. He refused to let me stay there and forced me to leave. And so I did.

I began walking slowly to the bus stop and I remember something just snapped in my brain. I remember feeling dazed. I remember hurting *so* bad and thinking to myself this man I trusted so completely has done terrible things to me. I remember it hitting me how horribly *wrong* it was. I think that was the exact moment I came to realize I was being sexually abused, without knowing the term for it at the time. I really just went into shock.

I never got on the bus. I walked in my dazed state to the Orange Mall and I went and sat in the lounge in the women's bathroom in Sears. And there I sat until the Mall closed several hours later. I remember inconsequential details like all I had for dinner was a Three Musketeers candy bar. I remember women coming in and out of the restroom and some of them looking at me with concern; some asked if I was okay. No one knew what a traumatized little girl they were looking at. I remember exactly what I was wearing. I remember how alone I felt. But what I remember the most is the physical pain I felt when I used the restroom and how at that moment I came to a stark realization and I said to myself, "*Steve broke my hymen*". I just knew. And looking back now I realize that

Steve himself must have realized that, and that perhaps that was what he'd been trying to do all along. I think that date was when it happened and perhaps that was why it was the first time he had ventured to put his penis next to me. As I learned later, if there had been even the slightest penetration then Steve would have been guilty of statutory rape.

After the Mall closed I began walking back towards the church. It was 9:00 p.m. and even though I subconsciously knew my family must be worried, I could not bring myself to go home. I was still so in shock, so unsure of what to do. There was a small "Church of Christ" church located behind Covenant and their doors were unlocked. (The building is still there today, though it is no longer a church.) I went inside and I remember I curled up underneath their altar and I went to sleep. A couple of hours later when I woke up, I started to walk over to Covenant. But as I got closer I saw police cars and Steve's red VW in the parking lot. I froze. Suddenly I knew why they were there. So I went back to the Church of Christ and stayed there for awhile longer. Eventually I went back over to Covenant and the police cars were gone. I had a key to the church as all members did, and I went inside and went to sleep at the back of the sanctuary where the audio equipment was.

I stayed there all the next day. The next night I heard someone come into the sanctuary and I recognized the voice of my sister and our friend from the youth group. She was crying and asking him where I could be, and they prayed together. In my traumatized state I was not able to come out from my hiding place. But it was agony to hear my sister crying. This is to illustrate how Steve's actions had so affected me. My sister to this day remembers that time of prayer with our friend, and she recently said to me, "of course I didn't know you were in the back." She also told me she remembers our father crying when I was missing.

After the two of them left I started thinking that I wanted to go find a phone booth and call Steve. I don't know what I was thinking I would say to him then, but I started to walk to a nearby park – Shaffer Park - to find a phone. It was dark and I saw some men walking down the street towards me and I got scared. There was a fire station right there – the Shaffer Street fire station – and I went inside. I began to think that maybe they could help me find a nice Christian home where I could just go for the night to get something to eat and wash my hair. I was so hungry and so dehydrated.

The firemen of course took me to be a runaway and they asked me my name. I didn't want to tell them my real name so I told them my name was "Melody". They were very kind to me and I remember they fixed me a waffle and a Coke. They tried to get more information out of me and I began to realize they were stalling me until the police could get there, so I took off. I ran back to Covenant and spent my second night in the back of the church by the audio equipment.

What I didn't know at the time was that after I went missing, my mother looked for my diary. When she found it and read my words, she knew then that I had been molested. Of course she immediately notified the police about it and showed them my diary. As I learned later, Steve was then questioned for two hours by the Orange police department.

I do not know if he was questioned by the police on May 5th or May 6th, but it was one of those two dates.

On Wednesday, May 7, 1975, I stayed hidden in the back of the sanctuary until 3:00 when Steve arrived for work. I was watching for him from the window. As soon as I saw his red VW pull into the parking lot I headed over to his trailer office. I remember I just walked in without knocking. Steve looked up at me in surprise and shock; in his hands were the pages I had given him to read the last time I saw him two days earlier. It was clear that the first thing he'd done when he got in his office was gotten them out to read again. And I remember how his look changed to one of anger. In another letter to my teacher friend I refer to what Steve said to me then as "a rude few words".

I remember I asked if I could use his phone. He walked out of the office as I called my mother and asked her to come pick me up. She was so relieved to hear from me of course, and she asked where I was. I said "Steve Korch's office", not knowing then that she knew what Steve had done to me. Steve stayed in the main office trailer until my mother pulled into the parking lot. As I walked to the car he came out of the office and actually waved hello to my mother.

She told me we had to go to the Anaheim police department immediately. I cried; I did not want to go. I was hungry, I was dehydrated, I was physically exhausted and emotionally spent. But after making me something to eat, she took me to Anaheim PD. At first a male detective interviewed me. But he was very brutal with me and I was basically victimized all over again. I don't know why, but I was trying to protect Steve and didn't want to tell him anything. I remember he yelled at me. I cried and cried and begged him to let me talk to a female officer instead. Eventually they did bring in a woman and she was very gentle with me. She tape recorded my statement and helped me get through telling her my story. It took a long time because there were several incidents of molestation and she wanted all the details. She was the one who tried to find out if there had been any penetration.

In a letter dated May 12, 1975 to my teacher friend about these events, I told him "Right now I am in the police files as a runaway." I told him, "Two police departments are involved." About my time at the Anaheim police station I wrote, "I was there almost **4 hours** and maybe 1% of that talking time was about my "running away". The rest was about Steve Korch. They made me tell them everything I knew. I had to do it for Steve. They said if I didn't talk, it would mean much more trouble for Steve; that I would be ruining him." I told him, "I'm suffering right now very much. I haven't done a thing in school since I've been back. The other day in class I just put my head down and cried."

In that letter I also stated, "I'm waiting now to hear from the Orange police department whether they will be prosecuting Steve or not. The waiting hurts. My mind is so bogged down with thoughts. I can't concentrate! I feel like I died Wednesday – the day I came home."

Though the D.A. did want to prosecute Steve for what he did to me, ultimately my parents told them it would be bad for me and so charges were never filed. Because I was not strong enough emotionally then to testify against him, Steve got off completely. He went on to attend and graduate from Western Seminary and pastored several churches over the years.

A few days after the police investigation the church pastor, Dr. Ralph Didier, called my parents and I to a meeting with him and the deacons. What I remember about that meeting is my fear and that they told me that Steve had told Ruthie and the Orange police that I threw myself at him. They tried to put the blame on me, saying I had tempted him. My sister remembers that nothing was ever said; no one at the church was ever told what had happened.

The last time I saw Steve Korch was on May 25, 1975 when he preached on his last Sunday at the church. He never came to me while he had the chance to tell me he was sorry, to explain why he'd hurt me, or to ask my forgiveness. *He never came to me.* That is what hurts the most. Why not? And why did he pick *me*?

I remember the day after I returned to school, the principal let me have some time with my best friend in one of the offices to cry and talk. But I could not bring myself to tell her I had been molested. Now it's 30 years later and she and I are still in touch and one day in March 2005 I called her. I asked her if she remembered an incident in our junior year when I was missing for two days. She said yes and I asked her to tell me what she remembered about that time.

She immediately said "you were very quiet after that". She told me she suspected that "something happened with the guy at church". I asked her why she thought that and she said "because you didn't talk about him as much, and you did before that." She said that when I had talked about him before she got the impression he was like a mentor and that I was very fond of him, and she said I spoke very positively about him. She said she remembered the two days I was missing and that when I returned I was very sullen. She said, "your personality changed; you weren't a kid anymore". She had met Steve Korch once, when she came with the youth group on the outing to the mountains on March 15, 1975. Now, 30 years later, she would finally learn the reason for the drastic change in her best friend's personality. All these years I had never known she had suspected he was the reason all along.

I did not receive any counseling. My parents did want me to go for counseling but I did not want to go. I convinced people that I was fine. But inside I was in so much pain. I buried it and did not really let myself feel it. It was not until many years later that I spoke about the molestation with a counselor.

In a letter written in July 1975 to my teacher friend, I told him about the youth pastor that came after Steve and about some talks we'd had. I told him about having another meeting with Dr. Didier and asking him if the new youth pastor knew about what had happened with Steve and I. I wrote, "he said no, he told him just one little thing

concerning Steve that he really couldn't do much with. He told me just what it was he knew." Then I mentioned that during my second talk with the new youth pastor, "I found out that he knows everything and the pastor is the one who told him." So even though the members of the church were never told, there were other people who knew what Steve had done.

In 1980 (I believe it was in February) I decided to call Steve and Ruthie. I don't know why. Her father gave me their phone number in Oregon and I called. Ruthie answered; they had just returned from a trip but she sounded really happy to hear from me and she chatted away for several minutes, telling me about their children. Then I asked to speak to Steve. She put him on the phone but he clearly did not want to speak to me. He was as cold as ice. He barely responded to anything I said or asked and I finally ended the conversation, probably much to his relief. I never spoke to him again. I suppose part of me was hoping to hear him tell me that day how sorry he was.

I never married. Over the years I would have dreams about Steve in which I would scream at him and say "you never said you were sorry!!" In April and May 2000 when it was the 25-year "anniversary" of the events, I remember calling my sister and just crying, telling her I never had closure.

In 2002 news stories started coming out about Catholic priests who had molested children. Many of the incidents happened in the 1970's like mine had, and when I read some of the victims' stories about their trust being abused by someone of faith, it brought all my pain to the surface. It brought back a lot of my memories of Steve Korch hurting me. It was so, so painful. In April 2002, I got the idea for the first time to look for Steve on the Internet. I typed in his name in Yahoo and was stunned to see two links – that he was now the Dean of Western Seminary in San Jose, CA and that he had written a book called "My Soul Thirsts".

I ordered his book and read it, and before I finished it I drafted an e-mail that I had decided I would send. I sent the e-mail to him at Western Seminary on April 23, 2002, telling him I still needed to have him say he was sorry. The very next day Steve responded. He didn't deny what he had done. He called it a "moral failure" and said "my actions were undeniably deplorable". And he said he was sorry. I remember after I printed his response, I held the e-mail in my hand and said to myself, "so this is it? I'm supposed to feel closure now?" I still wondered why he had never come to me years earlier; why it took *me* coming to him to ask him to say he was sorry to get to hear the words. Or I should say read the words. I think now he should have offered to speak to me or meet with me to let me hear his voice and look in his eyes to see if there was really remorse. I think now that the words he wrote to me that day were simply to placate me.

My teacher friend's opinion of Steve's response to me was that it was too "polished", that he sounded very slick. I didn't see it myself at the time though.

Three more years passed and in early February 2005 as the 30-year "anniversary" approached I began having frequent thoughts of Steve and flashbacks to that traumatic

time in my life. I had trouble concentrating at work, I became very depressed and cried a lot. Memories I had repressed began coming back to me. I began thinking how very much I wanted to have a face-to-face meeting with Steve, to look in his eyes and ask him some questions and *hear* him tell me he was sorry *to my face*. I decided to see if Steve was still with Western Seminary and once again typed his name in Yahoo. This time to my surprise I found a web-site called religioushypocrites.com, which told about a lawsuit filed by Randy Chapel, a student at Western, against a woman named Debbie Brumbaugh, as well as Steve Korch, Western Seminary and other people at the school.

I contacted Randy Chapel in February 2005 and eventually decided to share my story with him about my experience with Steve Korch. It was hard to do this. But eventually I came to realize that in doing so we could get my story out there so people would know what Steve did to an innocent little girl who trusted him completely, and hopefully find out if there are other victims. This is why I have come forward to share my story. It is my hope that if there are other victims of Steve Korch, they will have the courage to come forward too and find healing, as I am trying to do after 30 years of pain, and that the words of I Corinthians 1: 3-4 would spring to life.