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Stories**Child sex abuse reaches far beyond Catholic Church, experts say.**

By *WILLIAM FINN BENNETT* /
The Californian (an edition of
the North County Times)



Hey! Hey! Hey!

A strong story from William, who advances the issue beyond the current headlines and also provides some good tips for parents and others. -- DAVID STOEFLER

TEMECULA -- Six years ago, Becky J.'s life revolved around Temecula Valley Baptist Church. She worshipped there, went to school there, and even worked after hours two days a week at the school to earn pocket money.

That's where she met 40-year-old Pastor Kerry Clyde Martin. But at 14, Becky didn't understand the concept of street smarts, she said. She didn't know when the man befriended her what the future held.

"He listened to my problems and would tell me how right I was if I had a fight with my parents," she said. "I always thought he meant it in a pastor way, or like a father."

Little did Becky know that as a cleric at two previous churches -- one in Maryland and one in Orange County -- Martin had already been accused of sexually molesting at least three other girls, all 14. Little did she know the friendly, charismatic minister was taking the first steps that would culminate in his repeatedly raping the girl over the next two years.

In 1999, a Riverside County Superior Court judge sentenced Martin to 205 years in state prison for his crimes against Becky: 20 counts of lewd acts with a child, 20 counts of penetration with a foreign object, five counts of rape by force or fear and five counts of unlawful intercourse with a child. Martin's three earlier victims testified against him at the trial.

Last June, a judge denied Martin's appeal for a new hearing. He is serving his sentence at Calipatria State Prison in Imperial County and did not respond to a request from *The Californian* to meet with him.

While the revelations of priests molesting children have focused attention on the issue, experts say the tentacles of child abuse reach far beyond the Catholic Church, that society has just begun to scratch the surface of the dimensions of child abuse by people in positions of trust -- church leaders with other denominations, teachers, coaches and counselors.

Cultivating the victim

During that first year, Becky said, Martin began inviting the girl to his office for private chats, confiding in her, sympathizing with her, telling her she was the only good girl in school.

Experts call it "grooming" -- the gradual process of first gaining a child's complete trust through kindness. Once they have the child's confidence, the pedophiles take it to the next level. The hugs prolong. The touches linger.

"It took months to progress," Becky said.

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A local prosecutor says that because many parents have a stereotypical idea of the typical child molester as the monster lurking in the bushes, they are often dumbfounded if the friendly cleric, Little League coach or Scout leader they and their child so believed in turns out to be a molester.

"The people who prey on children are often so nice, so caring, so loving," said Riverside County Deputy District Attorney Kennis Clark, who has prosecuted "thousands" of child sexual molestation cases since 1986.

Individuals, not institutions

Protecting one's child requires constant vigilance, Clark said. Harried parents, constantly on the run, too often simply go through the motions of making sure their children are safe, she said.

"We take the shortcut by letting the name (the church, the Scout troop, the school) determine whether our children are safe or not," she said. "You're too busy, so you buy a uniform, you find a ride, and we think we've done our job."

But that's not enough, she said. Parents can't let themselves think that because their child is part of an organization that supposedly exists to benefit children, the young one is safe.

"Individual vigilance is the only answer," Clark said. "To stereotype an individual church or group under the guise of 'how I am going to protect my children' is ridiculous. You have to know the individual. You are entrusting your child to an individual, not a group."

Escalation

Slowly, Martin weaved his web around Becky, asking her to write him notes telling how she cared about him, scolding her if he caught her talking to boys, asking her to stay after class, having her come to his office, court records show.

Then Becky's father went overseas for a year. "That's when he (Martin) started hugging," she said.

The hugging became more frequent.

"He'd say, 'Hey. Give me a hug. I love you, kiddo.' He always said that."

After nearly a year of "grooming," Martin's touching had increased and the sexual contact began, she said. "It was very gradual," Becky said in a recent interview with The Californian. "But once he started kissing, it went faster. The ball just started rolling from there."

The power of the "cloth"

Becky said she never told anyone what was happening because Martin was so popular with church members and such a powerful manipulator: No one would believe her.

"I was scared. If it came out, he would twist things and make it look like I was the one who did the wrong thing," she said. "I watched how people reacted to him. They really believed in him. I didn't think anyone would believe me. They would say, 'How can you say that? -- He's a man of God.'"

Deena Bennett, who works with the Riverside County District Attorney's sexual assault and child abuse unit, said that what really concerns her is that many church members see clerics as above reproach, so that abused children's fears of coming forward may be grounded in reality.

"Unfortunately, the power those people have is enthralling: They are larger than life and can do no wrong," said Bennett, who was the attorney who successfully prosecuted Martin for his crimes against Becky.

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Now, five years after Becky's ordeal began, she is making plans for marriage later this year. She said she doesn't remember the details of what happened after the sexual contact started.

"I don't remember because I don't want to," she said. "I want to erase it all," adding that she did not want her real name used in the paper, out of "security concerns."

Feelings of guilt

But erasing what happened to her may be more difficult than Becky imagines. Just ask Sandy G. The Oceanside resident was the victim of sexual molestation for more than three years by a Fontana priest in the early 1960s, starting when she was 6 years old.

Sandy spent many of her adult years in weekly therapy sessions, she said. Later, the sessions became less frequent. But with the tidal wave of reports of sexual abuse by priests surrounding the Catholic Church in recent months, she is now back in weekly therapy sessions, she said.

Sandy said she did not wish to have her full name published, out of fear that it could jeopardize her career as a psychotherapist working with abused and neglected children.

Wracked with guilt that somehow what happened was partially her fault, Sandy said she never talked with anyone about it. Her college roommate had also been a victim of the now-deceased priest, but even they did not discuss the man and what he had done -- putting Sandy in his lap in his rectory office, kissing and fondling her.

Deputy District Attorney Clark said children who are victims of sexual molestation typically have feelings of guilt about what has happened to them.

"The victim (feels like) she is an accomplice," Clark said. "It becomes even harder to tell someone the further it goes, because they (feel) complicit in the act. Guilt prevents them from coming forward," she said. "No wonder these kids are screwed up forever."

Becky even attempted suicide -- twice, she said. Once with pills, the second time with a knife.

Picking a victim

Sandy G. said Martin is typical of adults in positions of trust who sexually molest children.

First they pick their victim. Often they look for the lonely or shy child, someone they know they can manipulate, she said.

"From families I have talked to, it's the needy kids," Sandy G. said. Her own father died when she was just 7 months old, she said. "This isn't by chance. They pick you. They know how to size you up -- your vulnerability. They are not going to go for a child that is strong, street smart, someone that would say, 'What are you doing?'"

Prosecutor Bennett agreed. "They target individuals who have a void in their lives: They make an easy target."

Becky said she believes Martin picked her because he knew her and her family well, her troubles with her father, her obedience, her naivete. "I was the kind of person who thought you lose your virginity by kissing," she said.

Becky met with Martin's other three alleged victims, she said, and there was a common thread to each of their stories. "We were all quiet," she said. "We all had problems with our relationships with our dads."

Dimensions of the problem

Bennett said that her office often deals with cases of child sexual molestation by people

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in positions of trust. There are five attorneys in her unit working full time on child abuse prosecutions. The caseloads of those attorneys average about 25 to 30 each, every month, she said, and many of those involve sexual molestation.

Prosecutor Clark said that although about 80 percent of child sexual molestations occur within the home, the next biggest group of molesters are people in positions of trust,

"Every one of us has (prosecuted) a teacher, a Scout leader, a coach," Bennett said.

She is involved in one such case now, in Lake Elsinore, she said.

On May 6, she filed charges against Temescal Canyon High School teacher Charles Noppe for one count of sexual molestation with a minor over the age of 14, one count of felony corporal punishment and three counts of misdemeanor child annoyance or harassment for sexual purposes.

In 1998, an assistant youth pastor with a Sun City Church was convicted of oral copulation with a 15-year-old girl who was seeing him for counseling through the church, court records show.

Clark said that as a society we have just begun to realize the dimensions of the problem. One of the reasons for that, she said, is that many molesters manipulate and intimidate so well that they go undetected their whole lives, often committing hundreds of sexual acts against children.

Another factor making detection more difficult is the tendency -- particularly among churches -- to circle the wagons, protecting their own, believing the clerics can and will "repent for their sins" and the problem will go away.

Like the Catholic Church's now widely disclosed shuffling of pedophile priests from one parish to another, Martin had been accused of sexually molesting children at other churches, court documents show, only to be given another chance in a new town, at another church, because his former superiors did not hand him over to authorities. At one of those churches, Martin's brother was the pastor.

"Some of his other victims complained, but it was just swept under the rug," Becky said.

"I don't have any proof, but I will bet you that every single denomination has kept its secrets," Clark said. "It's not just the Catholics."

The aftermath

After Martin was convicted, Becky said, her personality changed dramatically. She went from being a shy, obedient child, always ready to cede to other people's demands, to being a rebellious outspoken youth, reveling in her newfound sense of power to say no, her ability to challenge authority.

Her family moved to Iowa, she said, and she began to drink heavily and became sexually active.

"I went off the deep end," she said. "I went to the other extreme: drinking, fistfights, yelling at my parents. I took 15 shots of vodka one night."

Her faith was badly damaged, too, she said. "I was angry at God: How could he let this happen to me?"

She blamed her parents as well, she said. At one point, during the time Martin was molesting her, she went to her mother -- and although she didn't reveal what Martin was doing to her -- she told her she wanted a different job, outside of the church.

She said her mother discouraged her from leaving her job at the church, telling her the church job was perfect because she could work around her school hours. "How could she not realize?" Becky said she asked herself at the time. "She closed my only escape route. Now I realize that I blamed them for not protecting me."

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Then when she was 18, she got pregnant by another man and had a daughter. "That was God's wake-up call for me," Becky said.

She no longer has contact with her 2-year-old daughter's father, she said, but she certainly knows how she is going to raise her little girl to make sure she does not also fall victim to a child molester.

"I'm going to teach her to figure things out for herself and that she can always come to mom and dad," Becky said. "I want her to trust authority figures -- but not all the way."

Advice to other children

Becky said she decided to talk with The Californian about her experience to help other children who may be victims.

"If there is another child this is happening to, I want them to know that they can speak up, because there is a way out," she said. "Tell your parents. Tell the police. Tell somebody."

Children need to watch for the danger signs, before things escalate, she said. They should watch out for adults who try to isolate them from their friends and family. show exaggerated signs of affection, or put them on a pedestal. "And do everything you can to make sure you two are not alone," she said.

Her faith has been restored, Becky said, but with changes.

"I'm closer to God, now," she said. "But it's not a religion. I believe it's a relationship between me and God."

She is stronger and has learned street smarts. "I can read people very well now, and I stand up for myself and what I believe in."

When asked what her feelings were about Martin today, Becky was terse. "I pray every day that God helps me forgive him -- but that's it."

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List: Tips to protect your child

Be sensitive to changes in your children's behavior: outbursts of anger, withdrawal, fearfulness: and in smaller children, acting out sexually. n Be alert to a teenager or adult who is paying an unusual amount of attention to your child.

Don't rely on the fact that the organization caring for your child has a wonderful reputation, focus on the individual caring for your child, not the institution.

Tell your children no one should ask them to keep a special secret. If that happens they should tell parents.

Teach your children to be assertive, that they have the right to say no.

Teach your children that no one should touch them in their private parts, and

if that happens they should tell mom or dad.

Source: Riverside County District Attorney's office and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

List: Warning signs of possible sexual abuse

Sudden reluctance to go someplace or be with someone

Inappropriate displays of affection

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Sexual acting out

Sudden use of sexual terms or new names for body parts

Discomfort or rejection of typical family affection

Sleep problems: insomnia, nightmares, refusal to sleep alone, bed-wetting, infantile behaviors

Extreme clinging or other signs of fearfulness

A sudden change in personality

Source: Coalition for Children Inc.

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