

Carol Hogue, Mother of Sexual Abuse Survivor and Child Abuse Prevention Expert



It was a Sunday in the spring of 2003. Our youngest son, Wesley, was weeks from his ninth birthday. Sundays were (and still are) busy days in our household as my husband, Marty, is a pastor.

Wesley and a friend had gone camping with a family friend and colleague of my husband's over the weekend. The boys got back from their camping trip in time for Sunday School. Wesley was tired and "out of sorts" that morning but I brushed it off to a fun but tiring camping trip. That evening I realized I was dealing with something more complicated than an over-tired child. As we were going through our normal bedtime routine, Wesley told me that Mr. Bob had touched him inappropriately—to use his words—he touched me where the bathing suit covers me. You've always told me no one should ever touch me there. I continued to listen as he shared more. I was careful not to ask leading questions. It was easy to do because I was having problems forming words of my own at the time. I was feeling a range of emotions: horror, anger, shock, betrayal, concern for Wesley, concern for my two older children, and concern for children in our church. The repercussions of this one man's actions seemed to have no end. This was not a normal Sunday evening!

Did I believe what my son was telling me? Absolutely. I got Wesley calmed down and immediately went to my older son's room and asked him directly if Mr. Bob had ever made him feel uncomfortable or touch him inappropriately. The answer was no. I asked my daughter the same question and received the same response. I then told my husband, Marty, what Wesley had shared with me. The situation was unthinkable, almost impossible to wrap our heads around, but we knew it was true.

Our first responsibility was to Wesley and our family – to access the resources that were needed to handle the situation appropriately to begin the healing process. We also felt a responsibility to our church family. It was important to shepherd them through this betrayal of trust. There were other victims who needed support and guidance.

You see, Mr. Bob was the church organist and a friend and encourager to all. He was not what he seemed to be. Abusers will often befriend and groom the child, their family, and entire organizations to gain access to children. Mr. Bob had done exactly that.

We were able to stop this man because we spoke up. We did not exercise the "privilege" of keeping our experience quiet. We knew nothing would change if we didn't talk about our experience. We made a choice to lead by example and provide a pattern for others dealing with child sexual abuse to model. We reported the abuse and worked through the legal system to seek justice. We accessed every service available to help Wesley begin the healing process, including the local Children's Advocacy Center, medical attention, and counseling services. It was a long journey comprised of forward steps and steps backwards. In time, the forward steps happened with increased frequency.

The trauma of child sexual abuse is real and had physical and emotional consequences for our son. He had difficulty concentrating and problems getting to sleep. There were multiple trips to the pediatrician for headaches, stomach aches, and asthma flare ups. The body will express your pain when you can't use your words. School was a challenge. When one person in a family suffers, it impacts everyone. An abuser's actions do not take place in isolation. We all felt the impact and had to work through the pain.

What got us through this difficult time? Our faith. And a lot of prayer. We had the love and support of family and friends. We had a deep and abiding faith in God and knew that he would not leave us or forsake us. We are now all stronger in our faith and committed to addressing the issue of child sexual abuse and to supporting those who have experienced it. All praise and glory belong to God. I was crushed. How many other kids had been hurt by Dan? How many more would be hurt in the name of keeping up appearances that everything was alright in our churches?