

Tragedy in the Watchtower Society

By Lorri MacGregor

We have spent a quarter of a century dealing with tragedy in the ranks of the Jehovah's Witnesses. We receive a steady stream of accounts of child abuse, broken homes, lost estates, unnecessary deaths from refusal of blood transfusions, and mental problems, all caused by this controlling organization.

We thought nothing could surprise us, we had heard it all. However a recent case reported in the *Chicago Tribune* under date of Wednesday, November 14, 2001 shocked and saddened us beyond the others. We feel we owe it to the young girl, Laree Slack, to make her story known.

Laree Slack, twelve years old, was one of six children in a devout Jehovah's Witness family. Following the Society's guidelines, the parents did not allow their six children to play with other children in the neighborhood. The children were ruled with extreme strictness and required to do chores around the house. It was obedience or beatings.

Laree's father was a big, strong man physically, weighing in at more than 350 pounds, and ruled his household with an iron hand. A very small annoyance to him started the tragic events in motion that would result in Laree's death.

It was Laree's job to do the laundry for the family, washing it and putting it away. She had apparently been lax in her chores, and dirty laundry had not been picked up that day. Her father had misplaced his jacket containing his wallet and credit cards and engaged the whole family to search for it. He felt the search was impeded by the dirty laundry and issued the dreaded command to Laree to "assume the position." She knew she was in for a beating. This was nothing new to her. No one could have anticipated the unleashing of her father's out-of-control anger against the child.

Another child got in his way first, Laree's eight-year old brother, who was struck four to five times in the legs and buttocks with an electric cable about three-quarters of an inch thick. Then he turned to Laree, and brought the cable down on her four or five times. This should have been the end of the beating. Laree further fueled his anger when she tried to squirm away after this initial beating. Upset by her evasive moves, the father ordered his two teenage sons to tie Laree face down to a metal futon frame. This sound like the inquisition, not a household in America.

Venting his anger, this massive man struck his defenseless daughter another 20 times with the cable. When Laree screamed in agony he ordered his sons to get a towel, which was then stuffed in her mouth. To make sure she couldn't continue screaming he tied a scarf over the towel "like a tourniquet." Not satisfied with this further act of brutality, he called in the other children to pull off her pants, while he cut off her shirt.

He brought the cable down on his victim another 39 times. What did the Mother do during all this brutality? Run for help to the neighbors? Call 911 and report his out-of-control sadistic behavior? Unbelievably, she took the cable and administered another 20 lashes to her shackled daughter.

It came out in court that more than 160 blows were delivered to this child at the hands of

her parents. No one went for help. No one dared stop the father. Laree's back began to bleed. Surely this would shock him into stopping, but he callously turned her over and beat her 39 more times, raining blows upon her stomach and chest.

Hours passed and Laree was finally taken to the hospital, where she was pronounced dead. A physician at the hospital had this to say according to the article,

“Do you know how hard it is to kill a 12-year old?” said Demetra Soter, a physician who is coordinator of pediatric trauma at Cook County Hospital. According to Soter, children as old as Laree Slack require “massive amounts of force to die like this.”

The social services had never been involved with the family except for one incident when one of their small children was found wandering the streets alone when a plumber had left the door unlocked. No one wondered why the children were apparently locked in the house. A high fence surrounded their property to keep the children in and prying eyes out. Neighbors were stunned at what was really going on in this reclusive family. They looked happy and normal as they went out in the door-to-door work their Jehovah's Witness religion required. They were all “spruced up” when they went out to the meetings past the neighbors. They looked perfect.

Is it true that no one on the outside knew about the abuse? In my opinion someone knew, and that “someone” included the elders of the Jehovah's Witness congregation where the family were devout attendees and followers. I know from 15 years experience that nothing goes on in the home life of the members that the elders do not know about. They are experts at “cover-ups” so no “reproach on the organization” results. They keep secrets really well, especially to protect the men in the congregation. They encourage extreme “head ship” behavior in the home by the husband, which allows things to get out of control frequently.

I pray this will be the wake-up call to the organization to stop covering over the bad behavior of their members to protect their congregation's reputation at all costs.

Some guilt must be shared because family members, who must have had suspicions, did not speak out. Even now they are covering up the situation. An uncle tried to protect the Jehovah's Witnesses by saying “It was not in line with religion. Something obviously went wrong, and we just want to grieve as a family.” One anonymous phone call to the Social Services could have triggered an investigation that would have protected the children. It is one thing to discipline a child, it is another thing to be abusive. The Society needs to address this growing problem.

My guess is they will simply wash their hands of this family, disfellowshipping both parents and disavowing any responsibility for the home situation. The children will suffer greatly, probably becoming more dysfunctional and lost. I pray that I am wrong, and real change will come about. Laree, I hope you did not die for no reason. May your death count for something positive in the future lives of Jehovah's Witnesses. I pray many Jehovah's Witnesses will see the writing on the wall and turn from this evil organization to a relationship with the Savior, Jesus Christ, finding peace and security and love.

NOTE: Of interest to all. At MacGregor Ministries we are now adding a number of audio tapes to our web, testimonies, and teaching tapes by former Jehovah's Witnesses. Go to www.jwinfoline.com

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