

IT WON'T HAPPEN TO MY CHILD

Thank you for this opportunity to talk to you about a subject that most would rather not talk about because they don't wish to believe that the stories they hear are all too true. I am not here to indulge anyone's curiosity about child pornography. Some of the things I will talk about will make you uncomfortable – even offend you. That is the nature of child pornography.

In August 1994, Thea Pumbroek died in a room of a Holiday Inn in Amsterdam. She had appeared in a number of pornographic films and died from an overdose of cocaine whilst being filmed in yet another pornographic movie. Thea was 6 years old.

In 2003, in Toronto, Canada, Holly Jones was abducted while walking home from school. She was raped, sexually brutalised and strangled. The man responsible, a computer programmer named Michael Briere, admitted during police interrogation that just before he abducted Holly Jones, he had been watching child pornography on the Internet and that the more he watched, the more he wanted to do what he saw in those images. . Holly was 10 years old.

In 2005, Steven Silbert was stolen from his family' holiday home, sexually brutalised and murdered by a a pervert who was known to the police to be a paedophile. Steven was 6 years old.

In October 2005, Micyela Ganchi was abducted, raped and murdered. Micyela was 6 years old.

In February 2007, Sheldean Human was found murdered. Police found a large collection of pornographic materials and children's toys in the room of the man arrested in connection with her murder. Sheldean was 7 years old.

In March 2007, Annestacia Wiese was found in the ceiling of a house. She was raped, sexually brutalised and killed. Annestacia was 11 years old.

The list of innocent little children sexually brutalised and murdered goes on and on, almost endlessly. I am sure that the parents of all these little children also believed that it couldn't happen to their children. But it did. As I read reports almost everyday of children being sexually abused and brutalised by those around us, I recall the chilling and accusing words of Einstein....*"the world is too dangerous a place to live in – not because of the people who do evil but because of the people who sit by and let it happen."* I also recall lines from one of Elizabeth Barret Brownings poems, *The Cry of the Children:*

*"Now tell the poor young children
To look up to Him and pray
So the Blessed One who blesseth all
Will bless them another day.
'Who is God', the children answer, 'that he should hear us ?
Up in Heaven, dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find,
Do not mock us; grief has made us unbelieving.
We look up for God, but tears have made us blind.'"*

If I were to ask you to close your eyes and imagine the worst thing that could possibly happen to your child, and then add blood and unimaginable pain, you would still not come anywhere near to the real horror of child pornography. A journalist who once saw images of child sexual abuse described the experience as follows – and I apologise to anyone who is offended:

“The pictures still haunt me. A toddler, innocent in her nudity, giggling over something unseen. Then the next frame. A torso has entered the picture, approaching, but the toddler is unaware, oblivious in her amusement as he draws nearer still, his arousal showing. Then another frame; nearly upon her, her private parts not welcoming but not closed off, for how could she know of the violation that was imminent?”

“Her face has changed now; a look of surprise and then horror and then pain. Her tiny hands cover her face now as he is fully inside her, and in the next frame, her face is turned to the side, trying to bury itself in the covers of the bed. Her tears flow now as she is ravaged. Her pretty blonde ringlets, she looks 3 years old. And I cry too, now, as I think of her.

“Who could do this to a helpless child? Who else was in the room, memorialising the sick, savage rape of this child? Is she alive? Did this happen 6 years ago or 16? Where can I find these men to kill them?”

“There are many other photos like these, faces frozen in time, easily distributed now via the Internet. Most of them show less intrusive invasions, though. Many are of children performing or receiving oral sex. Many are of youngsters posed, naked, on display. It is undeniable that these, too, are the products of a vile, corrupt immorality that exploits the innocent as it feeds its disgusting lust and then indulges the depraved

curiosities of those who would not explore so far into their taboo imaginations were it not so easy.

“It is deeply upsetting. No one should have to look upon such images, helpless to act; helpless to save; helpless to effect change in the hidden world where these things take place. I am against the death penalty, but if I had a gun and stood before the person who committed this act of violence, then I would aim for the eye and not miss. I would wait and watch while he died. And I would relish it. No virtue could make up for the rape of that little girl.

“You may think you know what the child pornography industry is but, no matter how cynical you are, you do not. Yes, it is naked children exposing themselves. But it is worse than that. It is adults having sex with children, even babies. But it is worse than that. It is the rape and torture of little children.

“This is the very heart of darkness. These are images that are more than shocking and repulsive. They kill your soul because you know that every poor child you see on those sites is dead. If not now at the hands of a sadist, then decades from now from alcoholism, drugs or suicide.....The pictures first make you sick, then angry and finally homicidal.

“I find myself searching for a reason to feel and seek mercy for the weak-minded people who succumb to the sordid solicitations of Internet sirens. I find myself cursing the monsters who manufacture and disperse the images exploiting sinless children. Most of all, though, I pray for that little girl. And for Thea Pumbroek, and for Holly Jones. And for the thousands of babies all over the world who have been brutalised, tortured

and murdered by the despicably depraved for the pleasure of the despicably perverted...."

"These are extraordinary times in the life of our children because of the pervasiveness of information technology on their lives. In such times it is not enough to follow the road. It is necessary to know where it leads, and, if it leads to the traumatising of our children, to follow another...and not to proceed with the utmost rapidity in the wrong direction. When we are confronted with a crisis, we cannot behave as though nothing very important were involved, as if it did not matter if we continued doing what we have been doing all along - with just a little more energy. We have to consider whether what we have done is wise, and, if it is not, to alter it." Our children should not expect anything less of us, for these are crimes against them for which we, as a society, must bear full responsibility.

Children are entitled to their childhood and their innocence. We are not protecting children when we allow them unsupervised access to the Internet, via computers and mobile cellular phones. We are not protecting children when we are silent in the face of a pornographic epidemic involving children. We are not protecting children by remaining silent and being part of the problem. By speaking out and by proper supervision of what our children may be exposed to, we become part of the solution.

At the risk of immodesty, I must confess that I am often quoted as "South Africa's foremost expert on child pornography" - not something I am proud of. Given that I have been involved in researching the subject for over 8 years, I probably know more about it than most people. I could describe, in detail, many of the most horrific images that I have had to see

during the course of my work. But even I could never know or feel the trauma of even a single child-victim of sexual brutalisation.

Paedophilia is often defended on the basis that intergenerational sex can be voluntary - an argument that is not only pursued vigorously but actively promoted by NAMBLA - the North American Man-Boy Love Association. "The young", argues NAMBLA, "are capable of demonstrating their reluctance if sexual advances are unwelcome and are, in fact, so much more worldly-wise about these matters than we think that they can, in some cases, be the instigators of intergenerational sexual activity." I do not wish to dignify this argument with any response. Toddlers do not and cannot volunteer to be sexually brutalised and tortured for the sexual gratification of perverts. And only perverts can seriously believe that children who have been brutalised for the production of child pornography had a choice. One can, in fact, go as far back as Aristotle to find a distinction between voluntary action and choice. Voluntary action, according to Aristotle, is that which has its origins in the actor. That is, it is merely uncoerced. "Actions that result from choice, however, while they are all voluntary in this sense, are also something more: *They originate from within the actor, but they are undertaken as a result of deliberation in light of knowledge of moral principles.*

The universal prohibitions on intergenerational sex are not based only on the fact that children have not yet developed the capacity *to deliberate in the light of knowledge of moral principles* to make voluntary choices about sex, but also on the fact that children are not physically, psychologically and emotionally developed to accept sexual penetration. Any sexual act with a child would harm the child physically, psychologically and emotionally. A few doctors have, in fact, confessed that they have not been trained to deal with the sort of injuries that a toddler suffers from

sexual penetration. That doctors need training to deal with such injuries is a telling comment on our society.

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