The picture above was when I first met Ewelina in Germany and later filmed the interview.

**The End of Silence**

**Sexual abuse in the Jehovah’s Witnesses faith**

01:11 01:30 (off screen/original sound) Teda

I was eight, he was grown-up, an adult man, a Jehovah’s Witness, and we went from door to door here. And then he went up there with me, and then he assaulted me. I was merely frightened.

01:35 01:57 (off screen/original sound) Ewelina

My family belongs to Jehovah’s Witnesses, and my father abused me sexually for several years, beginning when I was three, as far as I can remember. My father was not called to account. He is still a Jehovah’s Witnesses in good standing.

1:00 1:21 (off screen) Ruth

Things were such that I was abused and raped by my father for years. It began when I was nine, and continued until I was 16 or 17. My mother tried to get help from the elders. She called them in. Nothing was done. It was swept under the carpet.

1:23

(announcer:)

The men who abused Teda, Ewelina, and Ruth, were members of the same denomination: Jehovah’s Witnesses. Sexual abuse a societal problem world-wide. But the way Jehovah’s Witnesses handle it is unique.

1:49 2:54 (original sound) Teda

I had to go from door to door like other Witness children. That was mandatory. And there was always an adult accompanying, whether man or women did not matter. And I was assigned to an adult man. And he did everything so that I might always accompany him. It began quite harmless, that sexual abuse. I got more and more frightened since it happened more and more often, and sometime I told it my mother, and that I did not want to go from door to door any longer. And she believed me. And then the body of elders was summoned. And my mother and me and that man who had assaulted me we sat, as far as I remember, in a small room, and it was discussed and he confessed. His punishment was that he need not go from door to door with me any longer.

2:54

(announcer:)

Three times a week Jehovah’s Witnesses gather in their Kingdom Halls. Each meeting is led by men, so-called elders. According to the Bible, women must be subordinate. They cannot hold service positions. Conflicts and moral wrongdoing are dealt with internally by the elders in judicial committees. Lay judges without psychological training would interrogate children and pass sentences.

3:23

(announcer:)

Pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock is the title of the internal handbook for elders. It reads:

3:30 Quote

(announcer:)

Certain disputes between brothers should not be carried before worldly courts.

3:34 (original sound) Teda

Question: Was there ever some talk of reporting the man?
There had to be kept silence about the abuse even within their own ranks.

Every Thursday and Sunday we had our meeting in the Kingdom Hall, as it is called, and I had to shake hands with that man. And it was not merely on Thursdays and Sundays, but we met in a small group on Sunday morning, and persons were assigned there to each other. And he was no longer allowed to go from door to door with me, but each time I had to see him. My mother continued to visit his family, and he even tried to do it at his home, saying, Little Teda, come onto my lap! Or when he accompanied us to the doorsteps, at night when it was dark, he kept me back, and when you are eight or nine you do not know how to resist.

Question: How should the elders have reacted?

Answer: I would have wanted that this man was punished.

Watchtower and Awake! advertising brochures for non-members, mandatory reading for Jehovah’s Witnesses. They show how the members are expected to behave. The guidelines are valid world-wide along the same lines and are pre-determined by the headquarters in the USA.

The Witnesses believe that we are living in the last days; Armageddon, doomsday is just ahead. Only he who follows the strict Biblical rules is a good Witness, will not be destroyed, will enter Paradise.

Ewelina is eighteen years old and a Jehovah’s Witness, she was raised in that faith. Her father destroyed her childhood.

As a small child, I used to sleep in my father’s bed, and he abused me sexually. He gave me booze. The abuse continued since I was three, so far I can still remember anyway. And when I was eight we moved. After some time I told my mother what he had done to me. My mother was shocked and believed me at that moment. My mother turned to the elders, they didn’t believe it and demanded that we keep silent, that my mother doesn’t take the case to court, no reporting, no involvement of the public, and that my mother forgives him on behalf of God, that is.

Ewelina’s mother always stood by her daughter. She fought within the organization, she didn’t want to be silent. But report the own husband? She doesn’t want to say anything in front of the cameras. When she learned that her other daughter was abused, too, she did not turn to the police, but to the elders. Ewelina sought their help, too.

The elders are the contact you trust. You go to the elders if you have got a problem, you turn to the elders with any problem. These are the persons that according to the Bible actually tend the flock, who are in charge, whom you can trust, where you can be sure that these persons, the elders, will help to resolve the problems, will support you. And therefore you will go to the elders and will not turn to the outside world, yes, to counsellors.

Question: What did you expect from the elders at that time?

Answer: I expected the elders to believe my sister and me in the first place, that they support and help us by advising us to go to a counselling centre, to undergo a therapy, or to report the matter. I had hoped that they would have expelled the perpetrator, in this case my father, so that other children might be protected, too. But none of these points was granted.

Ewelina could not stand the pressure any more. By chance she learns about silentlambs, an American organization that is committed to abuse victims among Jehovah’s Witnesses. She contacts Bill Bowen, the founder of silentlambs, via the Internet.

During the past months I was not very well, inward I was not well, actually I dragged out a miserable existence from one day to the next. I said to me, well, just one more day, and then you will see perhaps you will never wake up again. Unfortunately this did not come true, like I wanted it to happen at that moment. And this is good.
The contact with silentlambs becomes the turning point in Ewelina’s life. For the first time she dares tell an outside person about her abuse.

When I spoke to Bill he said to me the following three words: ‘I believe you!’ Never ever has someone said this to me, at least not in that manner, and that made me so happy, that really made me happy since I knew he believes me.

This man gave Ewelina new courage: Bill Bowen for 43 years. In September 2002 he organized a protest march to Brooklyn, the world headquarters of the Watchtower organization. 125 Witnesses broke their silence and demanded that the organization must handle abuse within their ranks openly.

Bill Bowen wants to break the silence. Therefore he was disfellowshipped from the organization.

In 2000, I encountered a problem in my congregation: An elder I was friends with was suspected of abuse. For ten months I continually turned to the Watchtower organization. It turned out that he had already abused another child in the past. He confessed to it. But while we investigated he obviously continued as an elder, evidence was brought forth that he abused another child in the congregation. After eight fruitless calls at the branch office I turned to the legal department of Jehovah’s Witnesses and informed them about the suspicion. I was told to leave the matter for Jehovah, to ask the brother if he had done it, and if he denied I was to let the matter rest.

Ewelina’s wish comes true. Bill Bowen comes to Germany, wants to support her and other victims.

For close to twenty years Bill Bowen was a respected elder in the USA, able to see into the organization. The lamb—the symbol of his protest movement. Now he wants to encourage Jehovah’s Witnesses in Germany, too, not to be silent any longer.

Bill Bowen encourages Ewelina to tell about her serious experience. With this she might help other children. They decide to turn to the German headquarters of Jehovah’s Witnesses. The very next day they went to Selters.

Selters/Taunus residence of the German headquarters of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Here are living 1,200 so-called full-time servants in an order-like community. If an elder assaults a child it must reported here. Will Ewelina and Bill Bowen be greeted?

First contact. Werner Rudtke Branch overseer, is willing to speak with Bill Bowen.

The telephone call is put through. Another staff member of Jehovah’s Witnesses is to give information. There are hardly such cases in Germany, he says. It is an American problem. He [Bill Bowen] should turn to the American headquarters of Jehovah’s Witnesses. With this, the call ends.

Werner Rudtke, one of the highest-ranking persons in the Witness hierarchy, is at first willing to speak to journalists, and he gives an interview. He confirms that there have been cases of child abuse among Jehovah’s Witnesses. Later he forbids the broadcasting in this film.
If Jehovah’s Witnesses report sexual abuse to the elders, there is an internal procedure. From the elder manual: Quote (speaker:)

There must be two or three eye-witnesses if there is only one witness, nothing can be done.

Being a child, they did not believe me. The reasons: First, my age; I was quite young. I seemed to be untrustworthy. Second, at Jehovah’s Witnesses you need two witnesses for such matters. This means that you need two witnesses at one time, in order to report an abuse or to let someone know something. And that was impossible; I had no two witnesses for the sexual abuse by my father.

Ewelina

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Ewelina

They ask the perpetrator if he did it. Experts say that 90 percent of the abusers are lying. But the leadership of the denomination says that no accusation can last, if there aren’t two eye-witnesses. So, what happens if the perpetrator denies? Then they turn to the child and ask if it can produce eye-witnesses. But children have no eye-witnesses when they are raped. In 90 percent of all the cases that are investigated by the Watchtower organization, the child ultimately is left alone as a liar.

From the outset my mother endeavoured to speak with the elders, she wrote letters, she invested her strength, so that they might believe my sister and me and other children might be protected, too. Continually they said to her she should keep it back, should be silent, should rather stay together with her husband for the sake of God, than to leave him. So, they didn’t help her, they didn’t believe her the same way they didn’t believe me and my sister. We didn’t get any support. Actually, it was merely a constant struggle on the part of my mother, for she was actually blackmailed, she was forced to be silent. Not to go to the courts, not to go public. They made it clear that she would have no chance, even before court, if she went public, since Jehovah’s Witnesses had enough smart lawyers to brush the matter off the table.

Here in Bavaria, in a small village near Munich, lives Ruth, a former Jehovah’s Witness. She was raised in a Witness family. Like her sisters, she was raped by her father for many years.

My mother tried to get help through the elders, she got them involved when it became known that this befell my older sisters, too. And the elders came for a conversation. And then they merely asked my father if he repents, and they asked my mother: Do you forgive him? Yes, and that was it. No further steps. So he was able to continue to be up to his mischief in our family, he always went one step further, ultimately abusing and raping me and then trying it with my little sister.

Why didn’t the police get involved? Well, it is always said that you must not shame God’s name and God’s organization. And that would have been shame, just at that time. And that was the main reason that nobody was involved, for then they would not have been able to keep appearances that such things do not happen among them, within their ranks; they always mention in their magazines, publications, that this happens in a world which is so degenerate.

Danger comes from going outside to the outside world: this idea is constantly conveyed. That they are part of this world does not fit in the doctrine of the chosen people.

The sexual molestation of children is an ugly reality in our sick world.

Paul Kuberek lives in Munich. He was a Jehovah’s Witness for 45 years. He was a respected elder for more than 20 years. He knows about the internal dealings with abuse and the attitude of the Watchtower organisation.

I know of some cases, as an elder I was entrusted with them and I tried to help. The organization itself wants to hush it up and would like as far as possible that this doesn’t become known outside. There should be no reports. Once there was a lecture during a training for elders that came out as a letter to the bodies of elders later. It is one of those letters that only elders received, in which it read that we should not report it to the police as far as possible, that if case such things happen we should help the person, that he eventually might keep his position as an elder if that happens. Later this was toned down.

Question: Does a person, who abuses his children sexually, not automatically become disfellowshipped?

Answer: No, he doesn’t. Not if he repents.

Some women found the courage to speak about their painful experiences in this film. Other ones confirmed their statements, were however not willing to speak on-camera for fear to be expelled by Jehovah’s Witnesses. For many of them the Internet is one possibility to speak anonymously about their experiences for the first time, to
express themselves about the abuse, to find consolation and support. The figures are alarming. Affected persons from all over the world reported to silentlambs up to now. 

Silentlams knows of 60 to 70 abuse cases in Germany. For the moment this seems to be no high figure. But this figure is remarkable if you consider that the matter was not yet in the headlines here. Therefore I believe that the problem exists here, too.

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What is different from America?

Well, they handle it the same way as in Germany. They put pressure on the victim by requiring two eye-witnesses. They protect the abuser by not allowing the victim and his/her family to inform other members about the abuse. If you go to the police, in most cases the whole congregation opposes them, since the abuse is not proven to them. This is quite deliberate. There are thousands of such stories on my website. More than 5,000 affected persons turned to me and told me that they were sexually molested by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

I know of many, many abuse cases among Jehovah’s Witnesses, even very young persons, I am in contact with some of them, about some others I have merely heard. These are so many cases that I say to me this enough to knock me over. Because I say to me, if I had been the only one, my life would not matter to me. I wouldn’t mind if I say this or if I wouldn’t cope with the situation, that I find a different solution and do no longer exist at all. But it has shocked me to how many persons this happened and still happens. Children! I know children who are two years old, other ones seven, another girl is about fifteen, and they are being abused, and the elders, the congregation, know about it, and nothing is done.

It is not sufficient to disfellowship the person, for the abuse continues to take place. What person can take the responsibility for being silent? If you are silent, you are partly to blame.

Among the denominations the consistent procedure of Jehovah’s Witnesses in cases of child abuse is unequalled. In a general statement of summer 2002, it reads:

We know of the misrepresentation that our proceedings are said to be not appropriate to the problem of child abuse. This accusation does, however, absolutely not apply.

Anyone in a position of responsibility who is guilty of child abuse, will inevitably be removed from that responsibility.

If an accused does not repent and is not determined to refrain from such a behaviour in the future, he will not be allowed to remain in the Christian congregation.

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If you read this you wonder where the problem might be. But the statement is formulated in a way that the main problems of how Jehovah’s Witnesses deal with abuse, remain hidden. They conceal much. They don’t talk about the way the elders investigate the matter internally, about the two-eye-witness-ruling. I think this statement is not in harmony with their actual dealings with child abuse. Admittedly, they claim to abhor child abuse, not to tolerate such a thing within the organization. But since they protect the perpetrator and silence the victim, this statement is a lie.

Since 1991, Jehovah’s Witnesses petition for recognition as a public corporation before German courts. They insist on being put on an equal footing with the mainstream churches. If they succeeded, they could even collect church taxes. A good reputation, a positive image are important to them just now.
Again and again I am being asked: Are Jehovah’s Witnesses worse than other denominations? The answer is: Yes, they are! The mainstream churches do not perform internal investigations, they do not require the child to produce eye-witnesses for the abuse. They do not maintain secret files in which they hide perpetrators even from the police. Denominations don’t do such things. If you are a Catholic, Baptist, or Protestant, and your child is being abused, the representatives would say: Report him! Jehovah’s Witnesses don’t do that. They say: Just let us start an investigation and see what the outcome is. If you don’t follow the instruction of the elders but report the matter, the whole congregation will oppose you.

Recently an elder clearly pointed out to me that I should mind what accusations I make against my father, or in general, for that matter, since I might be held responsible because of slander and lying before worldly courts, but also within the Witness organization, too.

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This happens in Germany, in America, it’s the same policy worldwide, which is designed to prevent sexual molestation from being correctly investigated and reported to the authorities. I can only give the following advice to affected parents among Jehovah’s Witnesses: If your child is sexually molested, don’t go to the elders, go straight away to the police.

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Ewelina has decided to report her father to the authorities. This is her own voluntary decision. To her, this is a further step on the way to break the silence.

In the USA, abuse victims were expelled from the organization since they had the courage to go before the courts. Ewelina continues to believe in Jehovah, she wants to remain as a Witness. She has, however, lost her faith in the elders and the Watchtower organization.

Jehovah’s Witnesses declined to give any comment.

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