The Silence of the Lambs

Are Protestants concealing a Catholic-size sexual abuse scandal?

BY **KATHRYN JOYCE**

June 20, 2017

It was a hot day in July, a Saturday afternoon, and Kim James was bored. Her older sisters had taken her to a church event in their small hometown in Indiana, where the girls were spending their summer. Her parents were back in Bangladesh, working at the remote Baptist missionary compound where the family had lived, on and off, for five years. For an adventurous and high-spirited 13-year-old like Kim, Indiana seemed dull compared to Bangladesh. She missed her friends, the dozen or so missionary kids everybody called "MKs." She missed the menagerie her parents let her keep: goats, cows, a parrot, a monkey. She missed the jackals that called in the distance at night, and the elephants that sometimes crashed through the compound fence.

As she thought about the mission, though, Kim felt troubled. Something was weighing on her mind. So she decided to skip out of the church event—it was for little kids, anyway—and go see the pastor. She found him in his office, trying to compose the next day's sermon. Kim ambled around his desk, picking things up, putting them back down. Eventually, with feigned casualness, she pointed between her legs and said, "Is it wrong when someone does this—touches you here?"

The pastor dropped his pen and looked up. "Kim," he asked, "has this happened to you?"

At first, Kim said no. But as the pastor gently persisted, she began to sob. Yes, she had been touched, *there* and *there*, lots of times.

> The pastor asked Kim who had touched her.
>
> Uncle Donn, she said.
>
> Donn, the pastor would soon learn, was not really Kim's uncle. He was Donn Ketcham, the 58-year-old chief doctor at the mission hospital in Bangladesh. His father had co-founded the Baptist denomination that sponsored the missionary group, the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism; its goal was to create a "militant, missionary-minded, Biblically separate haven of Fundamentalism." Little known outside the world of Christian fundamentalists, ABWE is among the largest missionary groups in the United States, deploying more than 900 Baptists to 70 countries. His father's legacy made Ketcham a sort of prince within the world of ABWE: the doctor with the "magical name," as one missionary later put it, much beloved by the family of churches that

supported the group. He'd been the undisputed patriarch of the Bangladesh mission for almost three decades.

Kim gave the pastor only a partial, fuzzy account of what had happened to her; as a child raised in a fundamentalist "haven," she lacked the vocabulary to describe sex acts, let alone understand them. But rather than call Kim's parents or contact the police, the shocked cleric turned to a higher authority, placing an urgent call to ABWE headquarters in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

That, Kim would realize many years later, was when the cover-up began.

Kim's parents, Ken and Sue James, moved to Bangladesh with their four daughters in 1982, driven by a humble calling. Their life had always revolved around the church. When Ken was a boy, his family had hosted Baptist missionaries in their home, and he'd heard them talk about having to interrupt their work as doctors to re-roof a building or do other manual labor on their compounds. So when Ken grew up and became a handyman, he saw a role for himself at the mission. "We're not pastors or preachers," says Sue, "but he always wanted to have his hands to help."

It took years for the family to raise the money they would need in Bangladesh—$4,000 a month—to cover travel, living expenses, insurance, and contributions to ABWE. They spent their Sundays and Wednesdays driving to conservative Baptist churches across Indiana and several other Midwestern and Northeastern states, giving presentations about the missionary work overseas. It was a

long slog, but when they got to Bangladesh, they knew it had been worth it.

The 50 or so missionaries and children at the compound all seemed like one big family. Adults were called “aunt” and “uncle”; the kids were “cousins.” Presiding over the mission was Uncle Donn Ketcham, who had moved to Bangladesh with his wife, Kitty, in the early 1960s. A handsome man, with sideswept hair and a trim mustache, Ketcham cut a dashing figure as he rode his motorcycle on the jungle roads around the compound. He wasn’t just the medical authority, but a spiritual authority too, often leading the group in worship. “He was the ideal missionary,” Richard Stagg, an ABWE official and a friend of Ketcham, would recall years later. “He was a good surgeon. If your car broke down, he could fix it. If the generator broke, he could fix that. He was also my favorite preacher. He was smooth as silk. He had everybody fooled.”

Around the compound, it was an open secret that there had been “extramarital affairs” involving Ketcham and missionary women. Mission officials back in Pennsylvania had been receiving troubling reports since 1967, and had disciplined Ketcham for inappropriate relationships on multiple occasions. At one point, ABWE had issued a directive that single women at the compound were forbidden from riding with the doctor on his motorcycle. “Watch out for this man,” one missionary couple later recalled being warned when they arrived at the mission. “He’ll sweep you off your feet.”

But despite Ketcham's obvious pattern of misconduct, ABWE seemed more interested in silencing the women involved than in punishing their abuser. A few years after Kim's family arrived at the compound, a female missionary wrote directly to ABWE officials, recounting how Ketcham's own daughter suspected he was having an affair; she'd caught him in his office, door locked, with a woman. When questioned, Ketcham claimed that he had been "trying to help" the woman and insisted that "there was NOT an immoral relationship." At Ketcham's request, ABWE resolved the situation by banning the woman from the mission.

In a culture where sex was only discussed in whispers, and where submission to authority was paramount, Ketcham's privileged status remained unquestioned. Besides, he had a way of making others feel thrilled to receive his attention—especially the kids. "If he saw you coming, he'd light up and smile and say 'Hi,' and maybe give you a hug," recalls Kim's sister, Diana Durrill. "I don't ever remember it being creepy. That was the scariest thing about him: We weren't aware of what he was doing, because he was too good at it."

Kim quickly became Ketcham's favorite. Donn tutored her in math; Kitty gave all the MKs art lessons. When Kim's parents had to travel for missionary training, they often left their daughters with the couple. Ketcham let Kim hang around the hospital after school, allowing her to visit patients, change bandages, even hold newborns after birth. "I think that's how he got his hooks into me," Kim says. "Going up there every day and

seeing what was happening really intrigued me. Overseas, there were really no rules."

Like most fundamentalist families, the Jameses never talked about sex. Sue and Ken rarely even kissed in front of the girls. On the cusp of puberty, Kim was clueless. "I knew I was going to start my period, but I never knew why," she says. "I thought you could get pregnant from kissing a guy." So when, at twelve, she had questions about her body, she turned to Ketcham. "He was like a cross between a father figure and a grandpa," she says. "I thought the world of him—that he could do no wrong. He was perfect."

Kim wanted to know about masturbation: Was it as harmful, as wrong, as she'd been taught? Ketcham reassured her. "There's nothing wrong with that," she recalls him telling her. "In fact, this is how a guy does it." And then he proceeded to demonstrate.

Kim was embarrassed. "I'd never seen a penis in my life," she says. "I didn't know what it was. I just saw this foreign thing and I was shocked."

She tried to protest. "What are you doing?" she said. But Ketcham insisted it was fine. "This is normal," he told her. "This is what guys do."

"I don't think this is normal," she said. "Because my dad has never done this."

Silence and submission make fundamentalist Christians a ripe target: "Church people are easy to fool," boasts one sexual predator.

Ketcham encouraged her to touch him. Kim "didn't know what to do," she recalls. "All I kept thinking was, 'This is a doctor, the most godly man here. He wouldn't do anything that's not right.' Then I thought, 'Kim, just accept it. It's OK.' That's everything that was going through my mind."

After that incident, Ketcham began conducting regular breast and pelvic examinations on Kim when she stopped by the hospital or came to his house for math tutoring. At first, she'd ask questions, challenge him a little; Kim had never been shy.

"What's wrong with me, what are you feeling for?" she wanted to know.

"Nothing," he would reply. "Just checking." Although the exams were medically unnecessary—breast and cervical cancers are extremely rare in preteen girls—they became an almost daily occurrence.

In the months that followed, Ketcham escalated his abuse. He kissed Kim. He asked her to touch his penis. He had her over to his house while his wife was away, and sometimes when she was there, in the next room. Her gave her pills that made her drowsy. He told her how special she was, and gave her affectionate nicknames, like "Mugwamp," to prove it.

The Bangladesh compound was its own small world. Everybody noticed how close Kim was to Uncle Donn, and some were worried—though they never reported their suspicions. One day, a missionary who'd been watching

the James girls for Ken and Sue found Ketcham leaving Kim's bedroom after an in-home visit; later, when she checked on Kim, she found her crying. Another adult, passing by Ketcham's house one day, saw Kim sitting on the doctor's lap in his bedroom. A few minutes later, Kim came bolting out of the house, begging: *Please don't tell my mother*. Other missionaries blamed Kim for what they were seeing; the girl, some said, had a reputation as "boy-crazy," with a "habit of clinging to men."

Kim's confusion only grew. "My body likes it," she thought, "so either I'm a bad person or it's OK." The biblical teachings she'd grown up with, in a culture that preached abstinence and the sinfulness of sex, told her it was wrong. But Uncle Donn was a close friend of her parents, and the holiest man she knew. *He wouldn't do anything that's not right*, she thought. Ketcham told her God was using him to help her. If she told her parents, he warned, her entire family would be banished from the mission, "where God wanted them to be." Kim was old enough to understand the implicit threat: By speaking up, she would be ruining God's purpose for her family. And the blame would be no one's but hers.

In the spring of 1989, when Kim was 13, Ketcham raped her at the hospital. As she lay on an exam table—"like a corpse, waiting for him to get off"—she had only one way to understand the assault: *Love*, she thought. *This must be love.*

For evangelical Christians like Ken and Sue James, bringing up kids in a close-knit fundamentalist community feels like blessing

them with the ultimate “safe space” from the moral laxity of the larger culture. Sexual abuse is something that happens in the secular world, not among the God-fearing. This, after all, is the universe of abstinence pledges and old-fashioned courtship, where parents build their entire lives around shielding their children from worldly temptations.

Yet the potential for sexual abuse is actually exacerbated by the core identity of fundamentalist groups like ABWE. Like Catholics, fundamentalists preach strict obedience to religious authority. Sex is not only prohibited outside of marriage, but rarely discussed. These overlapping dynamics of silence and submission make conservative Christians a ripe target for sexual predators. As one convicted child abuser tells clinical psychologist Anna Salter in her book *Predators: Pedophiles, Rapists, and Other Sex Offenders*, “Church people are easy to fool.”

Over the past five years, in fact, it has become increasingly clear—even to some conservative Christians—that fundamentalist churches face a widespread epidemic of sexual abuse and institutional denial that could ultimately involve more victims than the pedophilia scandal in the Catholic Church. In 2012, an investigation at Bob Jones University, known as the “fortress of fundamentalism,” revealed that the school had systematically covered up allegations of sexual assault and counseled victims to forgive their attackers. Sovereign Grace, a network of “neo-Calvinist” churches, has been facing multiple allegations of child molestation and sexual abuse. In 2014, a *New Republic* investigation found that school

officials at Patrick Henry College, a popular destination for Christian homeschoolers, had routinely responded to rape and harassment claims by treating perpetrators with impunity, discouraging women from going to the police, and blaming them for dressing immodestly.

Nobody told the James family that women and girls had been abused at the compound hospital since the 1960s.Courtesy of ABWE

Allegations of sexual misconduct have also engulfed four of fundamentalism's most venerated patriarchs. Doug Phillips, a prominent leader of the Christian homeschooling movement, was forced to step down in 2013 from his nationwide ministry, Vision Forum, after he was sued by a former nannywho claimed he groomed her as a teenager to be his "personal sex object." The following year, Bill Gothard, founder of the influential Institute in Basic Life Principles, resigned amid more than 30 allegations of sexual harassment and molestation by former staffers, interns, and volunteers. In the first case to cross over into the cultural

mainstream, Josh Dugger, the beloved eldest son of reality TV's favorite fundamentalist family, fell into disgrace in 2015 with the revelation that he had molested five underage girls, including four of his sisters. And this July, the chief of another fundamentalist reality-TV clan, Toby Willis, is scheduled to stand trial on four counts of child rape.

This burgeoning crisis of abuse has received far less attention than the well-documented scandal that rocked the Catholic Church. That's in part because the evangelical and fundamentalist world, unlike the Catholic hierarchy, is diverse and fractious, composed of thousands of far-flung denominations, ministries, parachurch groups, and missions like ABWE. Among Christian evangelicals, there is no central church authority to investigate, punish, or reform. Groups like ABWE answer only to themselves.

The scale of potential abuse is huge. Evangelical Protestants far outnumber Catholics in the United States, with more than 280,000 churches, religious schools, and affiliated organizations. In 2007, the three leading insurance companies that provide coverage for the majority of Protestant institutions said they received an average of 260 reports per year of child sexual abuse at the hands of church leaders and members. By contrast, the Catholic Church was reporting 228 "credible accusations" per year.

"Protestants have responded much worse than the Catholics to this issue," says Boz Tchividjian, a former child sex-abuse prosecutor who is the grandson of legendary evangelist Billy Graham. "One of the reasons

is that, like it or not, the Catholics have been forced, through three decades of lawsuits, to address this issue. We've never been forced to deal with it on a Protestant-wide basis."

To investigate and expose sexual abuse in evangelical churches, Tchividjian founded GRACE, short for Godly Response to Abuse in a Christian Environment. In 2011, the group was hired to look into what had happened on the Bangladesh compound. While the abuse itself took place long ago, ABWE's denial and coverup spanned more than two decades—a pattern that eerily replicates the Catholic scandal. The authoritarianism that often prevails in fundamentalist circles, Tchividjian says, is what sets the stage for widespread abuse—and for the systematic mishandling of reported cases. "When you have so much concentrated authority, in so few fallible individuals, problems percolate," he says. "And when they do, they're not often addressed. Because the leaders who hold all the authority decide what to do with them."

It didn't take long for Kim to wish that she had never said a word to her pastor. Two days after his emergency call to ABWE headquarters in Pennsylvania, two high-level staffers from the organization landed in Indiana. Kim came to think of them as "the Russes." Russell Ebersole was ABWE's executive administrator for the Far East. Russell Lloyd was a prominent counselor for the missionary group, eschewing traditional psychology for "Bible-based" therapy methods. They arrived at her pastor's home looking grim and official, and immediately set about

determining whether Kim's story was true or merely "the exaggeration of an immature teenager," as Lloyd put it in "Journey to Bangladesh," a diary he kept about the case. For the next two days, the Russes interrogated Kim with only the pastor and his wife present, and without the knowledge or consent of her parents, who were still in Bangladesh. "It was nothing like, 'Kim, we're going to be talking about some things,' " she recalls. "No taking time to get to know me—just point-blank, we have to do this fast." Ebersole and Lloyd asked questions involving terms that Kim didn't understand. Did Ketcham have intercourse with her? Had he touched her clitoris? "What's *that*?" she responded, bewildered. "I think I was in shock. I'm 13, and I'm being taught the whole story of sex by these men."

The Russes already knew that Uncle Donn had a sketchy past; Ebersole had personally fielded a complaint involving one of his affairs with an adult woman at the mission. But now Ketcham was being accused of molesting an underage girl—the first time ABWE officials had heard an allegation of child sexual abuse. As Kim struggled to answer their questions, the Russes became convinced that she was telling them the truth about Ketcham touching her. What they couldn't believe, given fundamentalist precepts about the nature of sex and women, was that she was an innocent party. "It was lust in its most base form, uncontrolled in the body of a spiritually immature woman," Lloyd wrote of the 13-year-old in his diary. Ketcham, he wrote, had become Kim's "secret lover."

"Protestants have responded much worse than the Catholics," says the grandson of Billy Graham, a former sex-abuse prosecutor.

The next thing Kim knew, she was flying back to Bangladesh with her two interrogators. Ebersole and Lloyd had decided to confront Ketcham by surprise, to prevent him from concocting a cover story in advance. However much they blamed Kim for the "affair," they knew the doctor would have to leave the mission if he couldn't exonerate himself. On the long flight, they sat Kim between them and continued to drill her with questions. At one point, when she got up to go to the bathroom, Kim weighed whether to tell a flight attendant that she'd been kidnapped.

The Russes "strongly encouraged" Kim to sign a statement, styled as a confession, in which she apologized for her role in a "relationship" that "transgressed God's word." She didn't understand much of it, but she signed it anyway. "I did exactly what I was told," she says. "I think I was trying to protect Donn, because I cared about him. So I said whatever responsibility I have is fine. I guess that's the way I was raised: You accept your responsibility, and I wanted to accept mine."

Across the world, her parents were in a panic. All they had received was a cryptic message that their youngest daughter would be flying back from Indiana alone with ABWE officers. Unable to reach their other daughters back in Indiana, the Jameses came to fear that something awful had happened to everyone but Kim. Had their other daughters been in an accident of some kind? Were they dead?

When the plane touched down in nearby Chittagong, Ken James was almost beside himself. "Are my other two kids alive?" he asked the Russes. Assured that their other

daughters were safe and sound, the Jameses were almost relieved to hear the actual news: There had been some inappropriate touching, the Russes told them, between Kim and Dr. Ketcham. Nothing was said about a rape or a signed confession. Sue and Ken wouldn't know about any of that for many years to come. "They said it was fondling," Sue recalls. "We thought, 'We can handle that.' "

But the parents were given no opportunity to "handle" the situation. ABWE was in charge, and Ebersole and Lloyd refused to leave Kim alone with her parents. The plan, the Russes explained, was to drive back to the compound and confront Ketcham in person. If Ketcham was caught off-guard when they arrived, however, he recovered quickly. The doctor blithely owned up to what he called a "bittersweet relationship" with Kim, characterizing it as one in a long line of extramarital indiscretions. Saying he wanted to start at "the real beginning" and confess it all, Ketcham recounted "illicit sexual relationships with other women" dating back to his college days and stretching through his nearly three decades at the compound. Lloyd was impressed by the accused man's poise. Ketcham's "sense of humor was intact," he wrote. "His creative wit and clever use of words were still laced throughout his comments. He even laughed on occasion. It was as if he were describing someone else!" Still, the Russes told him, he'd have to leave the mission. After Ketcham excused himself to go home and tell his wife what was happening, the men from ABWE were surprised to see the couple return in less than half an hour. According to Lloyd's diary, he and Ebersole assured Kitty that her husband

had not “seduced” the 13-year-old, that Kim had been “a willing partner.” And when they told the Ketchams they would have to leave the mission after nearly three decades, Kitty seemed as unaccountably unruffled as her husband. “Interestingly,” Lloyd wrote, “her only notable question pertained to how long they would have to pack and be off the field, and to the severance package that ABWE would give.” He chalked this up to “unspeakable shock,” predicting that “torment, rage, bitterness, resentment, betrayal, shame, embarrassment, grief—if not present then—would soon visit her.” The Russes, so indignant over Kim’s “lust in its most base form,” were brimming with sympathy for the Ketchams. “How we ached for both of them!” Lloyd wrote.

The return to Bangladesh had been a big blur to Kim. But as dazed and terrified as she was, one thing was clear: It was her job to apologize. As soon as the Russes had finished praying over the Ketchams, they brought them to the James home for a healing visit. Tearfully, as Lloyd recounts in his diary, Kim told Uncle Donn she was sorry. As Kitty held a weeping Kim in her arms, Donn asked for the girl’s forgiveness as well. At Lloyd’s prompting, he praised her courage and integrity in coming forward. After a second prompting, he told Kim not to worry that “she alone was responsible for Donn’s ruined missionary career.” It was not, in other words, *all* her fault.

The matter was now closed, the Russes told everyone. There would be no need to talk

about this unfortunate episode again. As everyone hugged and cried, Kim went to embrace Uncle Donn. But Lloyd and Ebersole stopped her—to her "great dismay," Lloyd wrote in his diary, interpreting this as yet another sign of Kim's "strong sexual bonding to Donn Ketcham."

As the Ketchams packed their belongings, the Russes took pains to contain the story. They held what they called an "Extraordinary Meeting" to give adults at the compound a euphemistic account of what had happened, telling them Ketcham was leaving and not to discuss the matter further. (A nurse who attended the meeting recalled years later that the missionaries complied, in part, because of their strong belief in a verse from the Bible: "For it is shameful to mention what the disobedient do in secret.") Next the Russes called together the MKs. Kim had had an inappropriate relationship with Uncle Donn, the kids were told. It was wrong, and she was sorry. Then they were instructed to give her a hug. The children did as they were told. "Some even privately offered unsolicited forgiveness," wrote Lloyd. He was "encouraged." Kim was numb. "I don't remember feeling anything," she says.

Finally, to complete the façade of healing, the Russes convinced Kim's parents to invite the Ketchams over for dinner before their departure. That evening, Kim was bundled off to another family's home, while Ken and Sue shared a meal with their daughter's assailant. Ketcham—to Sue's astonishment and relief—was "his usual, laughing, carefree person." But looking back, she can't believe that she and her husband were "dumb enough" to

agree to the make-believe. “I know it sounds like we weren’t good parents,” she says. “But in a compound situation like that, where you eat, go to church, and work together, it’s like one big family. So when everyone is telling you to do this—and he *did* ask forgiveness—that’s what God wants you to do.”

Ken and Sue wanted to take Kim home to the United States to get help. The Russes talked them out of it. Bangladesh was where the family’s support system was, they said. It would be healthier for the Jameses to stay put.

Donn and Kitty Ketcham flew back to the States and settled down in Allendale, Michigan. ABWE officials rallied around the couple. On their advice, Ketcham wrote a letter to the churches that had sponsored him, confessing to “sin,” but not to child sexual abuse. Ebersole sent his own letter, explaining that Ketcham had left the mission over “immoral conduct”—a vague charge that most interpreted as mere adultery. Ebersole asked the churches to keep funding the Ketchams for two more months, until they’d resettled and found jobs. “A beloved brother has fallen!” Ebersole wrote. “May God help us to biblically restore him and to help bear the deep burden that he and his dear wife, Kitty, carry at this time.”

Because no one from ABWE alerted police or the state medical board that Ketcham had confessed to sexually abusing a child 45 years his junior, he was able to return to practicing medicine and teaching Sunday school. He would go on to see patients for another 23 years. For years after their departure, ABWE

president Wendell Kempton continued to write the Ketchams warm letters, sending "love and prayers."

Back at the compound, Kim became increasingly withdrawn and isolated. "I wasn't allowed to talk about it," she says. "We were told it was over and done with: Move on." The other missionaries blamed Kim and her family for driving away the compound's most revered leader. "Donn is needed here," a few told Kim to her face. "You aren't."

Worst of all, Kim felt betrayed by her own parents. "It almost killed me to see my mom and dad hug Donn and Kit, like nothing had ever happened," she recalls. She tried telling herself they were just being dutiful Baptists, "doing what they thought God would do: God wouldn't slap the crap out of him. God would turn the other cheek." But deep down, it was hard not to wish they had come to her defense. She stopped talking to them. She stopped eating. In 1991, two years after she told her pastor about Ketcham, she attempted suicide, taking an overdose of the Paxil she'd been prescribed. "I just felt alone," she says. "I told God if I could talk to him, I'd rather be there with him than down here not able to talk."

The family returned to Indiana, but Kim's downward slide continued. She repeatedly cut herself, requiring emergency runs to the hospital. She developed multiple eating disorders, at one point shrinking to 96 pounds. She tried repeatedly to kill herself. She enrolled in community college, but

couldn't keep up. She couldn't hold a job. She couldn't make a life.

Sexual abuse often derails the lives of its victims in painful and lasting ways. But when the abuse happens in a church setting, there's an additional burden—a kind of spiritual abuse, the sense that religious leaders have betrayed the power bestowed on them by God. "It really rattles people at their core in terms of faith," says Diane Langberg, a psychologist and seminary professor who serves on the board of GRACE. "People walk away thinking that God is a perp or complicit."

That's precisely how it felt to Kim. "God," she prayed, "you're a sick God to allow this to happen." But she was losing more than her faith; she was losing her entire world, the close-knit missionary community that had served as her extended family. ABWE was her whole life—the only one she had ever known. So when the organization finally reached out and offered to help her, Kim jumped at the chance.

In the summer of 2002, unbeknownst to the Jameses, a group of Bangladesh MKs gathered for a reunion in Pennsylvania. Nine of them asked to meet with Michael Loftis, ABWE's then-president, to discuss Donn Ketcham. The meeting lasted for three hours, until 1:30 in the morning. Seven of the women told nearly identical stories of how Ketcham had molested them as children, often under the same guise that he used with Kim: breast and pelvic exams, sometimes conducted with their mothers sitting unaware in the room. One former MK recalled going

on a trip with Ketcham and blacking out, leading her to wonder whether she had been drugged and molested. ABWE officials, the women told Loftis, had "always protected Uncle Donn"—and poor Kim James had been blamed for her own abuse.

Loftis seemed shocked. He promised to launch an investigation and pay for any treatment the MKs needed. But the investigation went nowhere, and ABWE still neglected to report Ketcham to the authorities. Loftis did take action on one front, though: He called Kim and invited her to come to ABWE headquarters in Pennsylvania for free medical assistance and counseling. Kim, who was unemployed and living with her boyfriend at the time, had heard of a program for eating disorders that she wanted to try. What did she have to lose?

In a bizarre reprise of the events 13 years earlier, Kim's parents had no idea what was happening. One Sunday morning in July, Sue got a call from their pastor. "Kim's in Harrisburg," he told her. "Russ Ebersole wants to call you." Later that day, when the family reached Ebersole and Russell Lloyd in Pennsylvania, the two Russes told them that Kim was once again with them. And she had something to say. Then Kim's voice came on the line. "I got saved!" she told her parents.

When the abuse happens in a church setting, there's a kind of spiritual abuse, the sense that religious leaders have betrayed the power bestowed on them by God.

ABWE, they feared, had taken over Kim's life again. The Russes told the family to meet them a few days later at the airport; they were flying to Indiana with Kim to go to her

boyfriend's apartment when he wasn't home and clean out her possessions. When they showed up, Ken and Sue thought their daughter looked dazed, out of it. They couldn't understand why she was being rushed out of her apartment, but the Russes were adamant. "Kim," her father told her, "you don't have to go. I'll tell them you're not going." But Kim said she wanted to.

This was the start of what the family refers to as the "Bermuda Triangle years." For nearly two years, ABWE blocked almost all contact with Kim. When she arrived in Harrisburg, Kim says, officials took away her cell phone, telling her not to contact her family so she could focus on getting well. When her parents tried to check on her, she was only allowed to speak to them with the church's staff or lawyers monitoring the call. They begged her to come home, but the ABWE handlers would cut in, telling them not to interfere with Kim's "recovery." Then the calls stopped.

Kim remembers little about the next 22 months. She was bounced between Pennsylvania and North Carolina, where she lived at one point with Lloyd and his family. Ken and Sue James received occasional letters, which didn't sound like they were written by Kim. Then the letters stopped, too. Ken tried to track her down in North Carolina, to no avail. Finally, in a panic, he called ABWE and threatened to "get in the pulpit of every church in the country and say what's going on" unless he heard from Kim immediately.

That week, Kim called. She was in a homeless shelter in Asheville, North Carolina. Her

sister Diana was living about 70 minutes away in South Carolina, and a shelter worker drove Kim to her house. She was disheveled and confused. She didn't want to talk about what had happened—partly out of embarrassment, Diana suspected. The next day, Kim called her old boyfriend back in Indiana, who bought her a plane ticket home.

Over the next five years, Kim continued to struggle. She still cut herself, still had eating problems. Whatever had happened to her during her time with ABWE, it hadn't helped. She had not been saved.

Then, one day in 2010, Kim got a call from a former MK named Susannah Beals Baker. The gathering at the reunion eight years earlier hadn't forced ABWE to reform itself—but it had gotten former MKs talking about Donn Ketcham and remembering things that they thought were similar to what happened to Kim. Talking to Baker, Kim knew for the first time in her life that she hadn't been the only one. It gave her an unfamiliar burst of empowerment.

At the urging of a new counselor, Kim demanded that ABWE hand over all the documents it had on her case. Not surprisingly, officials resisted at first. But Kim told them that her counselor needed to have her history to help her. "If you want to talk to my lawyer," she added, "feel free." That did the trick. ABWE didn't send all the documents, but they did include portions of Lloyd's diary, a copy of Kim's "confession," and the correspondence that allowed Ketcham to reestablish himself in the United States.

ABWE, for all its efforts to bury Ketcham's crimes, was finally losing control of the story. In 2011, Kim helped Baker launch a blog, Bangladesh MKs Speak. They began publishing testimonies of those who had suffered sexual abuse at the hands of Ketcham—and, most explosively, the ABWE documents Kim had obtained. Within the first week, the blog attracted some 1,600 comments, including stricken responses from ABWE parents and former MKs, and a horrified testimony from Ketcham's pastor in Michigan, who said ABWE had grossly misled him about why Ketcham had left the mission.

The blog sparked new allegations of abuse. One day, as it was preparing to launch, Diana called an old missionary friend to talk about how best to be supportive of her sister's project. As they chatted about Ketcham, Diana recalled the time she'd stayed at Uncle Donn's house while her parents were away. She was in bed, fading in and out of consciousness. Ketcham, leaning over her, told her she had typhoid fever. The rest was a blur.

Her friend was stunned. "The same thing happened to me," she said. Left with the Ketchams, the friend had also been diagnosed with "typhoid." She woke up foggy-headed and troubled by strange dreams, with symptoms of a urinary tract infection. Soon thereafter, she began to experience insomnia, depression, and severe anxiety—symptoms of PTSD that would last into early adulthood.

ABWE officials were undone by the public revelations on the blog. They posted their own "confession," acknowledging that "a precious 14-year-old should never have been asked to sign a confession," and asking—nine times—that the MKs "please, please forgive us." They held a bizarre "sackcloth and ash" ceremony, captured on video, in which Loftis, the ABWE president, prostrated himself before a representative MK and cut his hair and clothes as

he confessed the church's failure to protect children from Ketcham. (The MK to whom he confessed later called the episode a "freak show," and said she just sat there "frozen in shock and horror, disbelief.") More important, ABWE finally reported Ketcham to the Michigan Medical Licensing Board. Twenty-three years after he'd admitted to child sex abuse, Ketcham, who was still practicing medicine in his early eighties, forfeited his license.

But ABWE wasn't done with the coverup. To placate the Jameses and the MKs, the group hired GRACE to dig up the whole story. Then, when GRACE was only two weeks away from publishing its report, ABWE abruptly fired the group. The MKs and their families were livid. ABWE announced it had hired a private investigative firm, Professional Investigators International, to replace GRACE. But PII, the MKs quickly discovered, had been founded by a Mormon couple who also ran an image-consulting business. The former missionaries were convinced that this "investigation" would amount to nothing more than a whitewash. Kim and Diana declined to be interviewed.

Last spring, however, PII published 280 pages of findings, drawn from 204 interviews. Even for the MKs, the report was a bombshell. Donn Ketcham, the firm found, had been molesting girls and women at the Bangladesh mission as far back as the 1960s. Investigators identified at least 23 missionaries who had been molested or raped, 18 of them children. "Donn Ketcham engaged in a wide range of sexual misconduct," PII determined, including "sexual harassment, consensual extramarital affairs with adult women, sexual abuse of minors and adults under the guise of medical care, rape, and statutory rape."

In exhaustive detail, the investigators confirmed both Kim's story of abuse— finding she had "a minimum of 10 to 15 sexual encounters" with Ketcham—as well as her subsequent mistreatment by ABWE, which "treated the victim as if she were complicit." Other former missionaries told stories that were sickeningly similar to Kim's. Several said that Ketcham had started giving them breast and pelvic exams when they were as young as three. In 1969, an eight-year-old girl had come down with a bad case of shingles—rare among children—after seeing Ketcham and possibly having sexual contact. In 1970, one victim said Ketcham raped her during a physical. In 1975, an MK ran away to another family's home rather than go to her physical with Ketcham. And over the years, several former MKs had said they'd received injections from Ketcham and blacked out during exams; medical staff at the mission's hospital had speculated that Ketcham might have administered ketamine, a powerful anesthetic, and molested the girls. The

hospital eventually stopped using ketamine, in fact, because multiple women had reported that after surgical procedures, they "dreamed" they had been raped.

The mission's leader, undone by the blog's revelations of abuse, held a bizarre "sack- cloth and ash" ritual to beg forgiveness.

The investigators were unsparing in their description of Ketcham, a "confessed pedophile" who expertly practiced "manipulation, deceit, and sociopathic behaviors." But they came down hardest on ABWE, which gave Ketcham "preferential treatment," blamed his victims, and failed to dismiss him from the mission field years sooner. By 1974, they found, ABWE officials had more than enough evidence to warrant Ketcham's removal, "which would have preempted his access to many of his victims." While other missionaries were banished for minor infractions—one man for being "cocky," a woman for showing a "lack of essential reserve" in dealing with Bengali men—Ketcham went unpunished. Instead, ABWE kept missionaries silent about his abuses by requiring an "unquestioning compliance with authority"—an approach that drew on the "prevailing attitude toward authority in evangelical circles." To cover up the scandal, the group had burned files related to Ketcham, and redacted huge portions of the documents it did turn over. ABWE administrators had even proposed creating a "Dark Information Book" to hide similar scandals. As a result, PII concluded, "children were 'sacrificed' so that the ministry would not be 'discredited.' "

ABWE officials who dealt with Ketcham, including Loftis and Russ Ebersole, refused to comment for this story (Russ Lloyd could not be reached for comment). The group's current president, Al Cockrell, responded to questions by issuing a statement. He suggested that PII's report may include unspecified "misinterpretations or errors," but acknowledged that it contains "absolute facts" showing that "past ABWE leadership failed to act with integrity and accountability in our handling of abuse perpetrated by Don Ketcham," and "utterly failed in our response to his victims."

The report was undoubtedly incomplete; the number of Ketcham's victims had almost certainly been higher, and investigators made no attempt to interview the Bengali "nationals" who were his main patients at the hospital. But for the MKs and their families, it was enough. "I was frankly shocked that ABWE actually released the report," says

Diana. “It was accurate for the most part, as far as how the mission covered it up, how they treated our family.”

For the Jameses, the report underscored just how much they’d been kept in the dark for decades. They never saw Kim’s “confession” until it was posted on the blog, and didn’t know that Ketcham had raped her until they read her account of what happened. “We saw it when everybody else did,” Diana says. “It was absolutely, completely devastating.” But after the initial shock, Diana started asking Kim questions about what Ketcham had done to her. It was the first time the two sisters had discussed it in detail. “She started answering and we just cried,” Diana recalls. “She thought our parents knew.”

Now Sue and Ken finally understood why their daughter had struggled so much. “Kim thought we were choosing God’s work and the mission over her,” she says. ABWE had lied to them. If only they’d known, perhaps Kim could have moved on. “The knowledge of that would have changed the last 22 years,” Diana says. “It would have changed her life if my parents had been told the truth.”

The explosive findings about Donn Ketcham’s serial abuse, and ABWE’s role in covering it up, did not make big headlines. Such stories rarely do. It’s another product of the sprawling, disparate world of Christian fundamentalism: Even the ugliest story about a relatively obscure Baptist denomination isn’t going to get Catholic scandal–level attention. But the report that finally emerged, almost three decades after Kim James was raped in Bangladesh, added to the growing evidence of a widespread crisis of sexual abuse in conservative Protestantism.

Kim’s name is now on legislation that would close the legal loophole that helped Ketcham evade punishment. The Kimberly Doe Act, drafted by GRACE founder Boz Tchividjian and conservative activist Michael Reagan, would hold U.S. citizens overseas to the same requirement to report suspected child sexual abuse that applies stateside. (If such a law had existed in 1989, ABWE officials, doctors, nurses, and parents would have been obligated to report what happened to Kim.) The bill would also hold organizations like ABWE responsible if they don’t train their employees to report sexual abuse.

While officials covered up his crimes to protect the church, Ketcham had molested or raped at least 18 girls at the mission.

“Someone asked me: Are you more mad at ABWE or Donn?” says Sue James. “Donn Ketcham, yes, we’re very angry at him. But in some ways it’s a different anger at ABWE. All these kids would have been safe if they’d taken the guy off the field when these things first happened. Think how many MKs would have not been hurt.” (Ketcham, who refused to cooperate with PII’s investigation, did not respond to repeated requests for comment for this story.)

Even if Kim’s law passes, it won’t enable her or other MKs to hold Ketcham accountable for his crimes in Bangladesh. But the accounts from the blog and the PII report may yet result in the doctor receiving a measure of justice. Last August, Ketcham was charged with abusing a six-year-old patient in Michigan while conducting a medical exam. The alleged abuse, which took place in 1999, came to light after the patient’s mother happened on the blog and read Kim’s documents. In February, Ketcham was ordered to stand trial in Michigan District Court. At 86, he faces a life sentence for first-degree sexual assault—half a century after he started abusing women and girls in Bangladesh. Twenty-eight years after he raped Kim. Eighteen years after he allegedly molested a six-year-old.

Within that timeline is a world of blame—and warning. Sexual abuse among the nation’s thousands of evangelical denominations may never come into focus the way it has in the Catholic Church. But more and more cases will inevitably come to light—revelation by revelation, report by report, headline after headline—even as conservative churches cling to their happy-family images, no matter who gets hurt. Boz Tchividjian, the founder of GRACE, says his fellow Protestants should reject the impulse to view the scandal the way many Catholics did for years: as a matter of a few bad apples being belatedly punished. “Protestants are going to have to accept the fact that we have many more similarities than differences with our Catholic brothers and sisters when it comes to how we have failed to protect and serve God’s children,” he says.

Kim, who’s now 42, still can’t bring herself to read the PII report. Her parents can only manage to digest small portions at a time. But the family can talk now. “My daughter and I are mending for the first time, because the truth came out,” says Sue. Kim still struggles. This past summer, she cut deep gashes in her legs. She doesn’t have full-time work, but she helps her boyfriend with his car-detailing business and volunteers in the doctor’s office where her mother works—a small way, she says, of finding her way back to the medical field that she loved as a child.

Not long ago, Kim's sister Diana was back in Indiana to attend a wedding. She and her two daughters, ages twelve and 14, took Kim out to eat. Staring at her two young nieces, she was suddenly struck by a thought: Do you realize this girl here is the age you were when Donn started molesting you? And the girl next to you is 14—the age you were when you brought it to light?

The moment had the impact of a revelation. "I looked at the twelve-year-old and I was like: I was *that* young? It just hit me." It really hadn't been her fault. "I never saw that before, I never did. It's a shame it took me this long."

Kathryn Joyce is a contributing editor at the *New Republic* and author of *The Child Catchers: Rescue, Trafficking And The New Gospel of Adoption.*

@kathrynajoyce

https://newrepublic.com/article/142999/silence-lambs-protestants-concealing-catholic-size-sexual-abuse-scandal