

Dr. Mr. Pickles,

I cannot begin to tell you the grief and heartache I feel right now. If I start at the beginning, I can tell you my husband and I were staunch supporters of Tommy Shelton for all the years he ministered at Ezra Church of God. My family attended there when it was a small, one room building with an outhouse. Tommy performed our wedding ceremony in that small church. We continued his following into the new building across the street. The building, by the way, that was built by his brothers (Shelton Construction) and is one foot shorter on one side than the other. Danny, evidently, had not found his true calling at that time.

I worked closely with Tommy for all those years, and each time allegations would arise, he would call me in his office and recite the cover-up story he had carefully planned. He personally told me about Brad Dunning and the mistake he (Tommy) admitted making by trying to meet with him alone to find out if he had indeed made advances to the other boys in school. He again called me in his office when he was caught with another student from school in a bald-faced lie. He was very convincing to be sure. As I said, I stood against his accusers because I thought there was no way any of this could be true. The students had grudges against him, other people misunderstood the situation, excuses he spoon-fed his followers and we regurgitated at appropriate times.

As a mother, I will never forgive myself for my own absorption and mindless following of Tommy's plight that I missed clues within my own family. For that reason, it took 25 years for my own son to admit he, also, had been abused by Tommy. The scabs that had covered his own pain for so many years were ripped away this week when new allegations arose and more of his friends broke their long, overdue silence. A dam broke when he was forced to step back to that dark place he had sealed up so long ago. His only excuse was that he knew I hadn't believed all the other boys, he didn't think I would believe him either. Because of this simple statement, I will live with my own guilt and regret for the rest of my life.

Also, in hindsight, I blame Carol as much as Tommy. How could you, as a mother, turn a blind eye to what you knew he was doing? You were condoning it by keeping your silence. How could you rob us mothers the opportunity to help our sons grieve and help them begin their healing? You turned your cold heart to us and allowed Tommy to continue with his sickness clear across the United States. You did him no favors by "forgiving" him, when what he needed was help to get well. Instead, he kept infecting others and you stood at his side and helped him. As far as I know, you stand there today with the same blood on your hands.

Professionally, I have a Master's degree in Social Work. When I look back at the church in those years under Tommy's leadership, I see that the black seed of his sin was at the very core. I see the many families he split in two because of his lies and cover-ups. Some of these never recovered. When I look at the lives of the boys he abused and see where each of them is today, I know that many have internalized the abuse and are still living with the guilt he placed on their heads. The guilt that forced them to face their

feelings alone as they kept their silence against the man placed before them in a position of power and authority by their own parents. The boys who have never worked through the process of grieving over what they lost. There should be a special punishment for a person who abuses the trust of children and shatters their dreams; a special punishment for the man who ripped the joys and pleasures of childhood from young boys and changed their self-perceptions forever.

Moreover, can anyone imagine the guilt and regret of the mothers who failed to be there when their children needed them the most? Mothers who will always feel they failed at the job God blessed them with by not doing enough to protect their children against this evil.

Anyone still protecting him, Carol, Danny, 3ABN, or the attorney who keeps spouting about statute of limitations, your hands will also be held accountable for the evil you work to cover up. There is no "stature of imitations" on the pain and suffering these boys feel- it doesn't go away after a set number of years- it's there for the rest of their lives. Come forward now and get him the help he needs. He admits to having a "sickness" and you have failed him as we have failed our children. Help the healing begin for everyone involved before any more time goes by.

From a mother's heart.