

A Modern Day Tamar

I was recently in a litigation process in which I was the plaintiff in a clergy/therapist misconduct case. I chose to file this suit because I felt that I had a moral obligation to expose the perpetrator in order to protect others from falling prey to him, to honor those who have been previously harmed by him and to seek justice for the loss and damage to my own life as a result of his behaviors. I also named the church who, with no background check and no questions asked, housed, supported, encouraged, recommended and praised him and his therapeutic and ministerial roles. I sought out various resources and professionals who encouraged and assisted me in filing the complaint.

Three years ago I made the very difficult decision that I believed necessary and important in keeping our churches, our therapist's offices and our schools safe for the men, women and children of our communities.

Sadly, since that time, I have gained much awareness about our judicial system which I believed was born out of the Judeo-Christian principles upon which our beloved United States of America was founded. I now feel it has become a mockery of those very principles and of God himself.

God's heart must be grieved. Do God-inspired men and women no longer fill those positions in our justice courts? If they do, then where were they when I needed them? Here follows an account of my experiences.

During the depositions that were taken of my witnesses in the case, I observed the defense attorneys asking loaded, ambiguous questions that, when answered, were used to cast a shadow on an issue which obscured the truth. Issues were brought into the case that was totally irrelevant and much time was wasted. The defense attorneys attempted to build a case for the defendants so they would not have to be held accountable or liable for their harmful actions and failure to act. It was shocking! Statements I knew were not the truth were presented to the court. When I asked my attorneys if it was legal for the defendants to do that, he told me that it was his job to disprove the false data.

I began to feel as though I was a defendant in the case rather than the plaintiff. Everything about my entire life had to be disclosed; from my birth to the present. On the other hand, much of the minister/therapist's history was protected and various rules were put in place so that much of the evidence, which exposed his long history of misconduct, could not be used in pleading my case.

I was shocked as I observed the rude behaviors displayed by the defense attorney. They used sarcasm and innuendoes and other dishonoring techniques that shamed and

taunted the deponents during questioning. They shouted and swore at my attorneys. They made derogatory comments about them. It was frightening to observe these supposedly civilized, educated, adult professionals display such behavior. One defense attorney fidgeted constantly in his chair, tapped his fingers on the conference table, whispered loudly to the defendants and the other defense attorneys and even snickered as witnesses spoke. At one point it became necessary for one of my attorneys to call on the judge to intervene on this man's disruptive behavior. I was stunned by what I observed during a litigation process, in our judicial system. I did not feel I was experiencing justice but rather living through a joke – a very bad joke! I felt it was a mockery of justice. I felt and still feel the issues are serious.

After going through nearly three years of humiliating, degrading, abrasive, abusive, uncivilized, “civil” litigation, my savings and all my financial resources available to me were depleted. I was finally forced to settle out of court for an amount that left me still owing several thousand dollars on case related expenses. I felt justice had eluded me.

A friend of mine from Canada has sent me several articles on cases similar to mine that have gone through the Canadian courts. In Canada, clergy and therapist misconduct comes under criminal law. In those cases the offenders faced long prison terms. One man, a 68 year old minister/counselor was sentenced to 15 years in prison. He will be 83 when he finishes serving his sentence. Our Canadian neighbors seem to understand the danger and depth of the damage that occurs when there is a betrayal of trust in this type of fiduciary relationship. Further, they do not allow plaintiffs in these cases to be further abused and victimized by their judicial system. Interesting difference!

This thought frequently comes to my mind. If the minister/therapist against whom I filed the complaint would have been a trust officer at a bank who breached his fiduciary responsibility to me by embezzling money from me, he would have been tried in our criminal court system and he likely would be doing a prison term. However, because he “merely” breached his fiduciary responsibility to me by embezzling that which was sacred within me, with the blessings of the church who recommended and praised his ministerial and therapeutic roles, his consequences were minuscule. The message I felt in all this: Money matters - souls do not!

We often have to pursue justice in other ways today.

I pray, “Lord bless our churches, our therapists’ offices, our schools and all who live in and enter our communities. Thank you for your goodness, your mercy and your grace and Lord help me to be a part of making our world a safer place to live.”