

A mother seeking justice for 33 years knows Epstein's victims' agony

I seek justice - for my daughter and for all the children in the same situation.

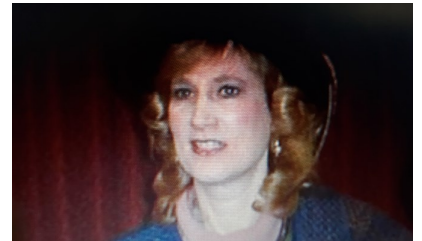
By Amy Neustein, Ph.D.

As a Jewish mother and child advocate, I was horrified to learn of the cruel and abusive behavior committed by convicted sex offender and financier Jeffrey Epstein. The manner in which he ended his life – by self-strangulation – left his victims figuratively “hanging,” depriving them of the much needed closure to the wounds they suffered for years, never knowing where to turn for solace or consolation.

The news reports show his victims crying out for justice, frantically looking toward his alleged accomplices as new prosecutorial targets. As a Jewish woman, I, too, cry out for justice not only for the Epstein victims, but for all the under-aged Jewish children who are forced into sexual slavery.

This is a topic I know a lot about. In fact, I've been crying out for justice for 33 years. I am not ashamed to admit that my daily existence has become a quest for justice for my daughter, whose voice I haven't heard in many, many years, whose face I haven't seen either, a child I yearn to hold and comfort. She is gone. If so, why do I seek justice? Because I am a rabbi's daughter and a deeply religious person. Isaiah taught us to “seek justice” – not to stand back and wait for justice to fall upon us. On the contrary, it is imperative to search for justice proactively and aggressively, even when we are likened to Diogenes searching for truth with the fading ember light of the candle. Here is my story:

More than three decades ago I became involved in a painful legal drama involving my daughter, who was left to suffer at the hands of an alleged pedophile and those who protected him rather than her. The story was described by Attorney Karen Winner (“Divorced from Justice,” Regan Books) as “the most notorious case on record.” I was referred to in a New York Magazine cover story on pedophilia as “the issue's best-known cause celebre.” What was never written about,



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because at the time it was too shocking to reckon with, was the vast network of power, from the institutions who exercised power over lay authorities, to the legal and governmental institutions who failed spectacularly and deliberately, by shielding the alleged pedophile – not the child – at every step of the way.

In 1986, my mother, a devoted rabbi's wife, walked into a room and witnessed her grandchild – my daughter – in the tight grip of her father. She described how the child's father was pressing his six-year-old girl against his pelvis and abusing her. My mother gave a detailed account of what she saw to the District Attorney of Ulster County who found her account credible. My child was evaluated by a leading expert in child abuse who supported her claims. But my child was never allowed to testify before the Ulster County Grand Jury nor was she allowed to be interviewed by the District Attorney himself. Why?

A series of New York power brokers stepped in to wield unusual influence in this case. First, my mother's report of witnessing the abuse brought forward a controversial agency, the Brooklyn Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (BSPCC). This agency was accused by Jeremiah B. McKenna, Chief Counsel to the New State Senate Committee on Crime and Correction, in a 24-page report to the legislature as being "known to assist divorced Orthodox Jewish fathers in gaining custody of their children" even if it entailed covering up things like pedophilic acts. He would later state in a letter to the New York City Human Resources Administration that "Amy Neustein is a victim of a criminal conspiracy."

Second, after the father made what the agency called "social visits" to the higher ups at the BSPCC, his request not to be investigated for sexual abuse was willingly obliged. He never had to answer any questions about his daughter and what he allegedly did to her. Instead, I was charged by the BSPCC with "neglect" for making a report of abuse "that was not totally true," even though my child confirmed the abuse to the agency workers herself. It was not easy for my child to talk to the workers who boasted of their repeatedly telling the child the "danger" she was posing to her father by speaking about the sex abuse. They told her repeatedly that "her mother was a liar" and that she, too, was "lying" about the abuse.

Such character assassination of both the child and the mother had dire consequences. As a result of this undoubtedly baseless charge of "neglect" and urging of the father's attorney that the child be placed in foster care, my child was immediately seized from my home and placed in a foster home. The Order of Removal was shockingly a blank sheet of paper. No grounds were given for the state's drastic action of coming into my home and ripping my child from me.

On my first visit to my daughter in the foster home, she pleaded to go back to me and was sternly told by the caseworker the reason why she couldn't go home was because she had "lied" about her father. The child who just starting the first grade penned a note to me, which was later made part of the court record and the legislative hearing record on my case. The note said "I'm not lying" (sic.) "I want to go home!"

Once in foster care, the social workers and the law guardian boasted to the Ulster County DA that he would have to “move heaven and hell” to get them to allow the child to cooperate with a grand jury investigation. After they scared off the DA by threatening to come to the trial and serve as “strong” defense witnesses for the father, not surprisingly, the case was dropped as if it had never happened.

There was another report of suspected abuse by the father, this time made by the foster mother. She reported the abuse to the foster care agency, which covered it up by “falsifying their records,” according to former City Council President Andrew Stein. As a result the abuse charge was never investigated.

During my daughter’s 17 month stay in foster care the agency workers would testify that my daughter continually asked why she was placed in foster care, while pleading to go back to her mother. They responded with telling her that she couldn’t go home because her mother had “lied” about the child’s father. Yet, all the facts pointed to a clear case of abuse of my child by her father, supported by mother’s eye witness account, the foster mother’s report of a subsequent abuse act, and by a leading expert in child sexual abuse who testified that my daughter was abused by her father “on more than one occasion.”

I only wish the abuse had ended there. Unfortunately, I had to learn about even more sordid events that were taking place in my daughter’s life. My child’s school teacher would tell me that my daughter complained bitterly of having to go on “appointments” every evening and “was terribly upset” because she couldn’t do her homework. At that time, my daughter became obsessed with “modelling” and complained about her figure both to me and to Mrs. Rachel Anolick, a rabbi’s wife, who would served as the visitation supervisor when I would see my daughter twice a month, as permitted by the court. My daughter on one of those visits was playing with Mrs. Anolick’s four year old son who took a Polaroid camera and took a few pictures of my daughter. Mrs. Anolick was shocked at how my daughter “posed” for those pictures and gave the photos to a legislative office looking into the case.

By This point, the case drew interest from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Kathy Rosenthal, a founding member of that organization, would write a letter to the Commissioner of the New York City Administration of Children Services urging an investigation of my daughter’s case, stating that the photos of my daughter “showed a child who was being groomed for child erotica.”

The case came to a head when my daughter was eight years of age. She was living with her father and I grew concerned over her continued loss of weight and her obsessing about having a model’s figure. I was prohibited by court order from getting medical care for my daughter. On one of those visits Mrs. Anolick and I became so alarmed that we rushed my daughter to the closest hospital for life-saving care. A once heavy-set child had become so slim that a shunt now had to be placed in her heart because of such severe anorexia nervosa. At the Kings County emergency room the admitting residents were stunned. They found my daughter to be dehydrated, emaciated, and

showing clear signs of “failure to thrive.”

The admitting doctor testified before a legislative committee, and told the press that the child was “by far the worst case of emaciation he had ever seen” and thought “she could possibly die.” After the child regained some of her strength from continual IV feedings she confronted her father in the hospital. A nurse overhead the encounter and reported to the child welfare authorities that the child screamed at her father “You got me into this. If you don’t get me out of here, I’m going to tell everything.”

But her father had no fears, because his cocoon of power quickly moved in to protect him. The Child Welfare Administration social worker assigned to investigate my daughter’s claims told me that the judge called him and was “in a rage.” He said “there is no sex abuse in this case!” The worker cowered to the powerful judge and closed the case without even talking to my daughter. Though the social worker told me he regretted his decision, there was nothing he could do.

My child never spoke about sex abuse again. Even worse, my visits were now permanently cut off. My child was expunged from my life. Being cut off from me permanently, she introjected all the animosity the agency workers, the judge, and the law guardian had for me, becoming another voice in the choir of hate.

I, on the other hand, became a tireless advocate for other mothers. While I remain a “childless mother,” facing every day with the rupture of my child from my life, I am deeply gratified in helping others. I walk with God. I have hope that the evil doers will perish and my daughter will seek the truth about what happened to her in the same way that I seek justice, for my daughter and for all the children in the same situation.

Ironically, it was Jeffrey Epstein’s high profile that finally proved his downfall. Power protects such perverts until the protectors themselves are put under a spotlight. Finally, at least, we are beginning to listen to the voices of the many powerless victims who have been forced daily to suffer such indignities and injustices. But it is time to do more than listen. We need to force such agencies and powerful protectors to become as accountable for their actions as those they are trying to protect. This is why as a community we must cherish and protect the safety and well-being of our children even if it requires challenging citadels of power, well-heeled donors, and illustrious institutions into reckoning with the scourges of abuse and the havoc it wreaks on the lives and souls of our children.

Let Jeffrey’s Epstein sordid life and suspenseful death act as a clarion call to stand strong against the powerful and influential. For if we don’t, we will have desecrated everything we hold dear.
