

Transcript: Panorama BBC

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[INTRO]

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Two years ago elders from this church heard a shocking story. This young woman told them her father was sexually abusing her. The elders called her a liar.

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): What are you meant, meant to do then if he's doing something wrong? And they said "Come to us and we'll deal with it." And I said to them "Well, I've already spoken to you and you've told me I'm a liar".

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The elders sent her home to her father. They didn't tell her that three years earlier he'd confessed to them that he was abusing her sister.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Tulsa, Oklahoma and a gathering of the church that let this happen. Over 6,000 Jehovah's Witnesses are in town for their District Convention. Panorama is here too. We're looking for answers from the leaders of an organization that's under fire, facing mountain allegations that it's shielding abusers, silencing victims and putting children at risk.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): It's a world-wide problem that is of epidemic proportions within the organization and no one knows about it, unless your child is molested.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Stevenson is on the Ayrshire coast in Scotland. It's a quiet holiday resort, a close-knit town and home to a thriving community of Jehovah's Witnesses. Door to door service, Bible studies and conventions are at the heart of family life for this young woman. But now she's left the church which she says betrayed her. She doesn't want to be recognised. She had a strict religious upbringing, her parents wedded to the Biblical principle that the father is head of the household.

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): We'd pray together, kind of thing, I mean we prayed before meals and we'd pray before going to bed, and ask God for help and ask God for forgiveness for anything we've done wrong that day. It was very strict. I was scared of my dad for years. I was really frightened of him.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): She and her sister spent hours playing alone. Their father taught them that outside influences were bad. He prohibited friendships outside the church. But, from the age of 11, her make-believe games hid a painful truth - her father had started to abuse her.

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I was in my bed one night and that's when my dad came through and started touching me and feeling me. I just lay there hoping that he'd go away.

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY) [in Official Witness Statement at Selkirk's Police Office]: Over the years since I was 11 until I was 15 my dad had done things to me that he shouldn't have done like rub my breasts, finger me and try to have sex with me. I remember when we were in Perth we were staying in a tent. He started to touch me and he made me touch him, and he made me put his penis in my mouth and things like that.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Were you scared?

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Terrified! There was one thing my dad told me, if I'd ever told anyone about this he would break me apart.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): For years she kept quiet, but one Sunday, after a meeting at the Kingdom Hall, she asked to see church elders. She needed their help.

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): And I just told them everything that happened.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Did they tell you that this was serious, that you should go to the police, that they would go to the police for you?

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): No, they didn't tell me anything like that. They didn't make any mention of the police.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): They said they'd deal with it.

GIRL (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Yes. After that they called my father in, and they had a very, very long chat with him. Then eventually they came out and we went home and that was the end of it.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): When confronted, Ian Cousins confessed he was abusing his daughter. He said he was sorry, so the elders sent him home with her. The abuse continued. Cousins was reprovved or admonished publicly by the elders, but church policy meant that no one was told why, not even his younger daughter.

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): It was announced on the platform that Ian Cousins had been reprovved, and after that I went to one of the elders and asked, well, "why has he been reprovved?". And he said "It's because of something he did wrong" but he wouldn't tell me what it was.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Even when her sister moved out, sick of the abuse, Alison still didn't know why. She missed her sister and was lonely. With one daughter gone, Ian Cousins turned on the other. It all began with an innocent goodnight kiss.

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I gave him a kiss, like a peck on the lips and then I tried to get up to walk away and he pulled me down and he forced his tongue through my teeth, my clenched teeth, and he tried to put the blame on me and said "Did you really think you should be doing that?"

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): He blamed you?

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Yes.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): It wasn't long before the abuse got worse. One day her father was accused of assaulting one of Alison's friends. She had to do something but had no where to turn - nowhere, except the Kingdom Hall. She asked to see a church elder.

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I told him everything that had happened and what my dad had done to me and he said that he didn't believe me at all and he said that I was a liar, and that my dad would never do such a thing and my dad was such a nice man.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Like her sister, she was sent home. Her father - "the nice man" - was free to continue abusing her. So she gave the elders an ultimatum: either they did something or she'd go to the police. They did nothing.

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY) [in Official Police Statement]: I have told the police about my dad because I am concerned that he has contact with other young girls through the church.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT WALLACE BURGESS (STRATHCLYDE POLICE): Some of these people gave good statements and very, very positive in their attitude in support of Alison and her sister. Other people felt that they didn't want to be involved and gave a negative statement and some people refused to speak to us altogether.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Why?

DETECTIVE SERGEANT WALLACE BURGESS (STRATHCLYDE POLICE): I've no idea why. They just refuse to speak to the police.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Were they Jehovah's Witnesses?

DETECTIVE SERGEANT WALLACE BURGESS (STRATHCLYDE POLICE): I believe they were.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): But they wouldn't help.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT WALLACE BURGESS (STRATHCLYDE POLICE): They wouldn't give a statement to us, no.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Only during the police investigation did the whole story become clear to Alison Cousins. Only now did she discover her sister had been abused too. Only now did she find out that her father confessed to elders 3 years earlier, yet no one had warned her, his next victim.

ALISON COUSINS (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Nobody told me anything. They all basically kept it all under wraps and told nobody what had happened.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): What they did was keep a record of her father's name and confession on a church database - a register of suspected and convicted pedophiles to be monitored. We asked Alison Cousins to obtain a copy of her records using the Data Protection Act. There, in black and white, was proof that the Jehovah's Witnesses had known for 3 years that her father was a self-confessed pedophile. Yet, far from monitoring him, the elders twice turned a blind eye to his abuse of his daughters. When he confessed to church elders, Cousins got a mild rebuke. When he confessed in court, he got 5 years in jail.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT WALLACE BURGESS (STRATHCLYDE POLICE): I believe we were the last to know. They had told several people before coming to the police, and these people had not reported it either to the police or the social services. We have a duty to protect, and if we're not told we are unable to protect.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): New York, the capital of big business, and a fitting home for one of the largest and richest religious organizations in the world. From here the Jehovah's Witnesses control over six million members. From here, the world-wide headquarters in Brooklyn Heights, every policy, every guideline, is dictated. Visitors are welcome and one message is clear. In this organization you adhere to God's word. Every month 50,000 Bibles come off the press ready to be sold world-wide. But this too is where they keep records of suspected and convicted pedophiles in their ranks. Bill Bowen, a lifelong member, has resigned as an elder. He says the men at the top are protecting the church, not the children.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): They do not want people to know that they have this problem, and by covering it up they just hurt one person. By letting it out, then they hurt the image of the church.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Elders must report abuse to the church's legal desk. Only if the law demands it must they contact the police. If it doesn't, they be told they have a moral duty to call them, but often it seems to stop here. It seems to go no further than the church's own secret database.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): Every detail is written down about what happened, where it happened, when it happened, how it happened.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): So you're saying the organization has its own sexual offenders register if you like.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): That's exactly right.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): That it's keeping to itself and not showing others.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): Exactly right. These men remain anonymous to anyone outside the organization and anyone really inside the organization unless you're personally reporting the matter.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): So was this the policy back in Stevenson that let Ian Cousins continue to abuse his daughters? The elders have stepped down and refused to talk to us, so we asked the man sent here to sort things out. Hello, Mr Briggs. We're from BBC Panorama as you know.

JONATHAN BRIGGS (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PRESIDING OVERSEER): I know that.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): We just want to ask you a few questions about the Ian Cousins Case.

JONATHAN BRIGGS (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PRESIDING OVERSEER): It's reasonable to really actually consider the brothers and sisters in the congregation that have had to undergo all this pressure. So I would just leave it at that. That's all I have to say on the matter.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The database, Mr Briggs, why should the Jehovah's Witnesses keep a database of men who have confessed to being pedophiles but the police aren't told? Do you think that's reasonable behaviour Mr Briggs?

JONATHAN BRIGGS (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PRESIDING OVERSEER): [Declines to respond, turns and retreats into the Kingdom Hall]

[JULY 11 2002]

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The latest name added to the list should be that of James Barrett. Three days ago, clutching his Bible, this elder from Rugby was convicted of indecently assaulting two boys and sentenced to two years in prison. The church was told of the allegations five years ago, but Barrett denied them and was allowed to remain an elder. So, how many names are on the secret database? We asked the headquarters in New York. They refused to tell us. "Focusing on numbers isn't meaningful," they said. After a lifetime in the church, Bill Bowen tells a different story. How many names do you suspect are on that list?

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): Twenty-three thousand, seven hundred and twenty.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): How do you know that?

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): I was contacted by sources within the church. I was given a figure of over 20,000. Two different sources came back to me and said that number is actually more specific and gave me a figure of 23,720. They told me that they had accessed the internal database and that figure was based on child molesters in the USA, Canada and Europe, and that's the figure that they were given.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Over 20,000 names on a secret database. That's why these people say the church has to listen. With Bill Bowen, they're calling for the Jehovah's Witnesses to come clean about their record on child abuse. His campaign, "Silent Lambs", has already heard from 5,000 victims. This candle-lit vigil is for them.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): Or it's what they're doing, once it's found out, causing their own members to be deeply disturbed.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Heather Berry and her stepsister Holly Brewer have flown here from New Hampshire. The man who abused them has been gaoled for a minimum of 56 years. He was Heather's father. Now Heather and Holly are breaking new ground, they're taking the Jehovah's Witnesses to court.

HEATHER BERRY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I'm Heather from New Hampshire. I don't want to tell my story but I've heard the word "victim" too many times today, and all of us are standing out here today and we're standing tall and proud and saying this happened and that it can't happen and we're survivors, and we're fighting and we're not victims.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): They're the first of those survivors to take their fight to court. They're claiming that not only did the church do nothing when they were abused, it ostracized and punished the family when they called the police.

HEATHER BERRY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I'm very glad I came, and like I said, I would do it again, and again, and again, and as many times as it takes to get a change in the policies and things that they hide constantly.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I'm really glad that the policy was talked about so much today, that it's an actual policy, it's not just a few elders that want to hide things. It comes from higher-up.

HEATHER BERRY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): It's a world-wide policy.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Yes.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): We asked the church for an interview to discuss the claims that they're putting thousands of children at risk. They offered us instead some video tapes. Here we have it, a box full of tapes in fact, Jehovah's Witnesses response, progressive understanding of pedophilia, education through publications, and one marked 'policies' and I'm told that's where we should get some answers. That night we watched the tapes, looking for those answers. In long letters, the organization had told us the welfare of children is of paramount concern to them, that they have a forceful child protection policy. We wanted to see it spelled out.

J. R. BROWN (WATCHTOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY'S OFFICIAL SPOKESPERSON): We've heard the suggestion that our policies may not be adequate to cover the problem of child molestation, but that's not the case all.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The policy couldn't be simpler. The elders should deal with all allegations of abuse.

M. R. INFANTE (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS): I think that's a very good policy, that the elders essentially would take charge of the situation of reporting the abuse to the authorities.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): But the authorities they're told to contact aren't the police, it's their own legal desk.

J. R. BROWN (WATCHTOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY'S OFFICIAL SPOKESPERSON): The fact of the matter is, we have a very aggressive policy to handle child molestation in the congregation, and it is primarily designed to protect our children.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): So how aggressive is it in practice? Just over a year ago Bill Bowen rang the legal desk in New York asking how he should handle an allegation of abuse in his congregation. The advice he was given has little to do with protecting the victim. He was told to go back to the man accused.

REPRESENTATIVE AT THE LEGAL DESK AT WATCHTOWER HEADQUARTERS IN NEW YORK: You just him again, "Now, is there anything to this?" If he says "No" then I would walk away from it. Leave it for Jehovah. He'll bring it out.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): Yep.

REPRESENTATIVE AT THE LEGAL DESK AT WATCHTOWER HEADQUARTERS IN NEW YORK: But don't get yourself in a jam.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): "Leave it for Jehovah". That, according to thousands of victims, is the Jehovah's Witness child protection policy laid bare. No one knows more about that than Sara Poisson. Holly Brewer and Heather Berry's mother knows her loyalty to the church cost her daughters dearly. Paul Berry, her husband, beat them. She suspect worse, that Heather was being sexually abused and went to the elders.

SARA POISSON (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I could tell from their looks on their faces that I had done a bad thing, that I had spoken against my husband which is a bad thing. And so their solution was that I should be a better wife, and I should pray more. That was their solution, that's how I could stop him from battering us. I assumed they were right. It had to be right because they know everything because they're God's representatives on earth.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): She couldn't convince them, but she was convinced that Paul Berry was sexually abusing their daughter, Heather.

HEATHER BERRY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): When I was about 3 years old I started displaying behavior that no 3 year old in their right mind would display. I was throwing stools out of 2 storey windows and I was, well, I went to Boston Children's Medical Hospital in the psychiatric ward when I was 3, because she found me stabbing myself with a screwdriver in the arm in the kitchen. He came to me in the black of night, Hands outstretched, there was no fight. The masked man slowly became familiar with my shape, Gently rubbing his hands on me, every nook, cranny and gape. My child, you are so sweet, So perfect and right, then I knew nothing but defeat. I tried not to think about the abuse as much as possible. I mean there was the physical abuse, there was the verbal abuse and there was the sexual abuse. And when none of it was happening, that was ideal, and that's what I tried to focus on the most.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): And all the while, you were going to the Kingdom Hall every Sunday.

HEATHER BERRY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): We were.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): You were going to meetings during the week.

HEATHER BERRY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): We were going out on door-to-door service.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Time and again, the girls were told to wait outside while their mother begged local elders for help. Time and again, they saw her sent home to pray harder and be a better wife. Holly, too, had her own story to tell, the story she'd kept secret from her mother, the story she knew by now the elders wouldn't want to hear. Her instinct was to tell the local policeman, but, after years in the church, she just couldn't.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT JACK ZELLER (KEENE POLICE DEPARTMENT, NEW HAMPSHIRE): Holly would actually tell me that she was very angry about things at home and she did on more than several occasions tell me that "Some day, Sergeant Zeller, I'm going to tell you something that happened to me" and I always told Holly, "When you're ready, I'll be there. You know where I am."

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Her mother saw the elders more than a dozen times, but remarkably it never strong Sarah Poisson to look for help outside the church. You can say that your children's lives are in danger, and in the same breath that you couldn't possibly go to the police. How can that be?

SARA POISSON (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Because God would not want that. It would never have occurred to me, and even if it had, I would not have done it because he's a man. He's a baptized male and he's a ministerial servant and I was a woman and they're kids, and that's even worse than being a woman. "These things need to stay in this room" - I've heard that many, many times. "You need to pray about it more." I can show you my Bible, it's paper thin. I still have it. It's all worn out. I did a lot of praying.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Even after you had told them that her father was sexually abusing Heather, nothing changed?

SARA POISSON (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): No, no. Well yeah, things changed, they got a lot worse, for me.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): In the end, the decision was taken out of her hands. In school bruises were noticed on her children. Social workers were told. They gave her a stark choice, leave your husband or we take your children. But if she left him, she knew the church would cut her dead.

SARA POISSON (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): At that point, I had to make decision between God and my kids. And I knew.. well, at that time I knew, that if I chose my kids, I don't have prayer, but I didn't care anymore. So we lost everything in one day.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Sarah Poisson had no life outside the Kingdom Hall. When the congregation cast her out she had no choice but to move away. She didn't just lose every friend she had, overnight she was homeless, penniless, scraping a living to bring up her children. The friends they'd had, openly shunned them. But with the family now free of the church Holly could finally tell her mother the truth: her stepfather had abused her too. When he tried to gain access to her younger sister, Holly finally did what the elders hadn't - she walked into the local police station.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT JACK ZELLER (KEENE POLICE DEPARTMENT, NEW HAMPSHIRE): It was clear to me that it was a life's crossing, a road to cross. Never any doubt in my mind that Holly could do it. It was a tremendous effort on her part, and it smacked of raw courage from beginning to end.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The Holly Brewer who walked into his office that day was a very changed, a very defiant young woman.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): My earliest memory is like about 3 years old, my latest memory is 10 years old, and he gradually worked into being interested in me to full-blown sex, intercourse, over those years.

[2:47 p.m. MARCH 7 1997 Official Police Video]

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): It was a harrowing time. The police took Holly back to the house where the abuse had started.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): He had a room that he had found in a very, very old house that was underneath the barn that you'd crawl through a hole to get to, and once you were in there, you were isolated from the entire house, and from everything, and that's where everything would go down.

[3:22 p.m. MARCH 7 1997 Official Police Video]

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): Would he kneel down on, next to you, or over you?

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): He'd like sit like this... and let me do..

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): All right

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): and then he'd lean over..

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): And did he tell you what he wanted you to do?

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I knew after a while.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): OK.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): She told the police exactly what Berry had wanted, of the brutal sexual assault she'd suffered throughout her childhood.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I had no vision of me growing up and being 16. I thought he was eventually going to kill me, you know - and then I'd be free and that's the way I looked at it.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): It's really hard to come back here now.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I know. He'd say things like "Thank you for obeying me" and he'd thank me for obeying him and reminding me of that word, that "obey" word. That was a big thing.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Paul Berry was confident Holly would never go to the elders. Apart from anything else, the Jehovah's Witnesses have a clear rule on sin. They need two witnesses or a confession before they'll take action. As Holly told her story, it seemed to police that this rule in a strict religious community would have let the abuse continue.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): All the way up to here..

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): So, this is the same piece of material.. All right.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT JACK ZELLER (KEENE POLICE DEPARTMENT, NEW HAMPSHIRE): Sexual abuse of children is not to be tolerated, and I don't care what their reasoning was, it was faulted reasoning. They were wrong, and as far as I'm concerned they were criminally negligent. That's my take on it.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): Even with just the child's word, with one witness, with just the mother's word, without the two witnesses their Bible tells them they need?

DETECTIVE SERGEANT JACK ZELLER (KEENE POLICE DEPARTMENT, NEW HAMPSHIRE): Well unfortunately most kids don't have several witnesses observing them get raped. That's an unfortunate part of it.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER (NEW HAMPSHIRE POLICE): It took nearly 4 years for the case to come to court. Paul Berry faced 17 charges of aggravated sexual assault.

SARA POISSON (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): I was holding Holly's hand and she had a lot of pointy rings on, and she was squeezing my hand really tightly, and it took them a long time to get through the verdict because there were so many indictments, and when it was over my hand was all blood and I didn't even feel it. And it was so powerful to be believed.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): But not everyone did believe them, even after he was convicted by a jury on all 17 indictments. Two dozen members of the Kingdom Hall turned up at the sentencing hearing. They all appeared to give character statements for Paul Berry.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT JACK ZELLER (KEENE POLICE DEPARTMENT, NEW HAMPSHIRE): He had already been found guilty and they found room in their hearts to stand in front of that child and say we don't believe any of it. And what they were saying was, they didn't believe the child, they didn't believe in the system of justice, they didn't believe the judge, they didn't believe the jury, they didn't believe anyone - except themselves.

HOLLY BREWER (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): Everything they were saying was "He's such a fine worker, I've worked with him secularly and he always shows up to work on time, he's such a good worker." Everybody said that and also the second half was everybody started saying "He's baby-sat our kids hundreds of times. I would let him baby-sit our kids every day, and he's such a good worker." And I was just sitting there like.. he's not on trial for being a negligent worker.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT JACK ZELLER (KEENE POLICE DEPARTMENT, NEW HAMPSHIRE): I can't imagine how badly she must have felt not to have been believed by elders in her own close-knit community. What a horrible blow to a child this must have been. Shame, shame on them.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): But another serious accusation is leveled against Jehovah's Witnesses. In their efforts to cover-up abuse, they may even try to frustrate police investigations. In Birmingham, West Midlands police were told of a sexual assault by a Jehovah's Witness on a young boy. They asked local elders for help.

SERGEANT STEVE COLLEY (WEST MIDLANDS POLICE): They were very reluctant to give up any information towards me. It was an uphill battle so far as the church was concerned, with me, virtually at every turn. They actually said to me unless I provide two Jehovah's Witnesses who'd actually seen the offense, then as far as they were concerned the offense hadn't taken place.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The boy was Simon Brady. He was just 9 when he was abused by a member of this Kingdom Hall. He felt he could tell no one.

SIMON BRADY We're taught if you go to elders, if you want to be believed or you have a complaint about someone, then there has to be more than one of you, there has to be two people. There has to be more than one witness, basically, you know. What can I say? They want more than one witness, you know.. every time I've gone to them, you know.. they wouldn't have believed me. Statement of Simon Andrew Brady, aged 18.

SIMON BRADY (in Official Police Statement): I recall that one of the brothers of the congregation, a man known to me as Jaswant Patty began to take an interest in me. I would have been 8 or 9 years old at the time.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Simon Brady's parents were going through a divorce. Jaswant Patty offered to help out, take him off his mother's hands.

SIMON BRADY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): He'd take me for drives after the meetings, he'd take me home from the congregation, you know.. give me a lift home. I can remember on one occasion he took me to his sister's flat while she was away on holiday. He said we'd go in and we'd check his sister's flat, and there he really sexually abused me basically.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): What did he do?

SIMON BRADY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): It was quite severe, to be honest with you, it was severe. So even now, to think of it, I don't.. you know.. it hurts now to talk about it, to be honest with you, and I've done that once already. I find it very hard to talk about it any more, basically. He dropped me off at home. I remember going to the bathroom and scrubbing with Dettol, because I felt dirty at what had happened.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): For years he said nothing, afraid the elders wouldn't believe him. When he finally did speak out, his instinct as a 9 year old proved right.

SIMON BRADY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): It's not so much did they believe me. Did they want to believe me? They didn't want to believe me. I think in terms of my house, you know.. they weren't open-minded and I think they'd already made their mind up even before they got to my house.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): The police did believe him, and they tracked down a second boy who'd been abused by Patty. But what happened next caused them serious concern. An elder confronted the victim's father, calling the man's son a liar. The father complained to the police, who warned the elder to stay away from the victim's families. His excuse was that, as an elder, he had every right to investigate the case for himself.

SERGEANT STEVE COLLEY (WEST MIDLANDS POLICE): It was his duty to test the evidence prior to the court case. I advised him that if that sort of behaviour continued, then if an allegation had been formally made, then I would have to investigate that particular person for offenses to pervert the course of justice, and in fact witness intimidation. The conversation did get a little bit heated towards the end, but obviously I'd a duty to protect my complainants and witnesses to the case. I made sure and sent out the signal that I was prepared to protect them and take drastic steps, i.e. arresting people, if they breached that.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): In Birmingham, as in New Hampshire, the elders supported the accused. Even after Patty was convicted and sentenced to five years in jail they didn't waver. At the next meeting in the Kingdom Hall, the elders made sure the congregation knew where they stood.

SIMON BRADY (VICTIM OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PEDOPHILE-PROTECTION POLICY): There's Nice McGivern saying "As a body of elders - that's including every elder in Rubery - we feel as a body of elders that basically this man is innocent, we believe he's innocent, and the Bethel have informed us they will do everything in their power to help this man".

SERGEANT STEVE COLLEY (WEST MIDLANDS POLICE): I then made it my duty to actually speak to the Legal Services Team of the Bethel in London and voice my disquiet about the lack of co-operation I'd had from start to finish from this inquiry.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Under police pressure, the elders did apologize and were demoted though not sacked. The London headquarters, the Bethel, refused to discuss any specific case. They said this was because the elders had to respect the confidentiality of the victims. But the victims wanted answers. We again asked for an interview with their spokesman, Paul Gillies. When he refused we phoned him, told him we were recording and asked a simple question. Are elders told to report allegations of abuse to the police or not?

PAUL GILLIES (WATCHTOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY'S OFFICIAL SPOKESPERSON): The elders' guideline is: if you get any single allegation of child abuse come to your attention, phone this office.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Why phone this office? Why not phone your local police station?

PAUL GILLIES (WATCHTOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY'S OFFICIAL SPOKESPERSON): Well, you see the first thing is we have to make sure for the protection of the child, that's our first priority.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Is it the protection of the child... is it fair to ask you, isn't it the protection of the church that comes straight to mind there?

PAUL GILLIES (WATCHTOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY'S OFFICIAL SPOKESPERSON): It is the protection of the child. We have a child protection policy.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): It was a long conversation and we asked if he'd be prepared to answer the same questions on camera. He refused. So it was back to America and back to a Jehovah's Witness convention in Tulsa. We'd been told we'd find a member of the Governing Body here. Ted JARACZ is one of the men responsible for the church's child protection policy. For more than two months we've been asking them for an interview. We want answers to some simple questions. Why do they keep their database of suspected pedophiles secret? Why don't they report all allegations of abuse to the police? Why do they send children back to the arms of their abusers? They refused to talk to us. But here at last we had our chance. Mister JARACZ, tell me about the database. How do you justify keeping a list of people, men in some cases who have confessed to pedophilia, but you have not reported them to the authorities. What justification is there for you to keep that list?

TED JARACZ (MEMBER OF THE SUPREME GOVERNING BODY OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES): You know, you're from Britain. You have a privacy law. You have a directive from the European Union. You observe that, don't you?

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): So when allegations of abuse are made, is it alright to keep them private?

TED JARACZ (LEADING MEMBER OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES): I think you were answered. That question was answered strictly to your satisfaction.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): Can you answer it now?

TED JARACZ (LEADING MEMBER OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES): I'm not going to repeat. I'll just tell you exactly and you will see it in writing. It is all in print. You know the Bible says "Do not go beyond the things that are written."? We don't go beyond the things that are written.

BETSAN POWYS (BBC REPORTER): And that was that. No doubt, no second thoughts. Just a simple belief that Jehovah will sort it out, a belief for which others, younger and more vulnerable, may continue to pay a price.

BILL BOWEN (JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ELDER 1984-2000): They're living in denial, denial of what's happening to their children, and it's not a matter.. you see, if they accept that, then they accept that there is a problem. So rather than admit that there's a problem, they will just let children go on and continue to be molested and not do anything about it.