

Stephanie Shires Story

TW - CSA story

Hello All, I'm Stephanie Shires, 30, currently living in Germany. I've been hesitant to share my story as a CSA survivor but have been encouraged by the tremendous support of this group so thought I would give it a go.

Although I was not "born" into a professing family in India, my parents started going to meetings when I was about 5 years old. Through many years I have never been close to any workers because I always felt like they were not relatable as people and always felt like they were in their own bubble.

When I was about 9 years old, one of the "elder's" of our meeting started abusing me. At that age I didn't fully grasp what was actually going on - I was more trusting that elders knew what's best. But, it went on for a few years until I was 11 - 12 years old. It reached the point where this predator was freely able to enter my room because we were all "the friends"- part of the fellowship and the belief was that no one would ever harm anyone. Being the oldest sibling, I used to get my sister to leave my room whenever this predator approached for fear of her also being subject to this situation. I was afraid of telling my parents for fear of putting myself in more harm. Thankfully we moved homes and were able to go to different meetings for a few years and I was 16 when we moved to a different city.

In the city we moved to, I was glad that I didn't have to run into this predator anymore except at convention or special meetings. But granted that I was able to pull through the many years in silence, once or twice a year seemed bearable. One day I happened to pick up a call from a number I didn't recognize. I was surprised that it was from this same person who I wanted nothing to do with. He wanted to talk to my dad who wasn't available to talk at the time. So he ends up telling me "don't tell anyone about what happened those years". I knew exactly what he was referring to, was utterly astonished and hung up instantly. Although I was slightly older, I didn't want to dredge up the past and tried to move on.

More years go on, I finish with university and was a working adult but with the

constant nagging sense that this person should not be in the vicinity of children. I moved back to the city I'm from where I ran into this person frequently at meetings. Finally when I was 25, I mustered up the courage to speak up and call this person out on his wrong doings. I started by telling my parents, who were totally horrified and extremely angry at what had happened. They encouraged me to talk to the workers about it. I talked to one of our overseers in person, stated all that I went through and how I found it very difficult to be in meetings and take communion from the very hands of my abuser. He was sympathetic and sorry for my experience but didn't say too much else. A couple of weeks went by and there was no change, it was as if nothing happened. My parents were really mad about it and went to confront this person. He denied EVERYTHING! I was extremely upset to find out that he almost claimed that I was lying. Why would I lie about something like this? It made absolutely no sense to me that nothing was being done. A few weeks later the meetings were shuffled around and were given new lists for meetings. No communication on what happened or anything. The person was asked not to take part in meetings but was allowed to come to gospel meetings because "we can't stop anyone from coming to listen to the gospel".

At the time I also kept hearing much about forgiveness and how we need to forgive and forget. But I always wondered how anyone would be able to forgive these misdeeds, did they truly understand the pain, distress and the trauma inflicted on a child?

Since none of the friends were warned of this predator, we ended up talking to one of the friends who supported us very strongly and even went to the workers and talked to them about how these things are unimaginable and this person should not be welcome in meetings. Not much was done though and I moved out of the country a few months later.

5 years later, this year, when I visited home and was astounded to find out that this person is not only welcome at meetings but also taking part!! Things were all back to normal as if nothing ever happened. It was very discouraging to see that this was totally covered up and the courage I had to speak up was all in vain. Not only was I NEVER asked for how I felt about any of this but was NEVER informed when this person was back in meetings. Although I spoke to the workers in India, they never

contacted to let me know how the situation was being handled and have since never really kept too much contact with me.

Reading through the different stories on this forum made me realize that this is a global problem of truly a large scale where those in power have turned a blind eye to many wrongdoings. I've been encouraged by many here who have shared their stories and by those advocating for change to come about. I hope that we are able to make changes to how the "system" works currently.