

**Report on the Media Coverage of Allegations of Historical Abuse of  
Young Persons in the Cornwall area 1986 - 2004**

**Cornwall Public Inquiry**

October 22, 2007

Prepared By:

Dr. Mary Lynn Young  
Acting Director and Associate Professor,  
University of British Columbia Graduate School of Journalism

## **Table of Contents**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction .....                                      | 3  |
| Methodology .....                                       | 4  |
| Media Landscape .....                                   | 8  |
| Quantitative Print Media Findings .....                 | 11 |
| Qualitative Framing Analysis .....                      | 17 |
| Broadcast Media Framing Analysis .....                  | 21 |
| Letters to the Editor .....                             | 23 |
| Conclusion .....  | 24 |
| Bibliography .....                                      | 27 |
| Appendix A – Coding Sheet .....                         | 29 |
| Appendix B – Sample U.S. Media Coverage                 |    |
| Appendix C – Neiman Reports: The Story Behind the Story |    |

## **Tables**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Table 1.1 - Origin of Print Media Content .....                | 8  |
| Table 1.2 - Print News Content by Genre.....                   | 12 |
| Table 1.3 - # of Sources in Print News Content.....            | 14 |
| Table 1.4 - First Source in Print Media Coverage.....          | 15 |
| Table 1.5 - Key First Facts Cited in Print Media Coverage..... | 17 |
| Table 1.6 – Tone of News Content.....                          | 18 |

## **Graphs**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Graph 1.1 – Origin of Print News Content by Year, Region..... | 10 |
|---|----|

# **Report on the Media Coverage of Allegations of Historical Abuse of Young Persons in the Cornwall, Ontario, 1986 - 2004**

## **Introduction**

This study examined the media coverage of allegations of historical abuse of young persons in the Cornwall area over a 19-year period using both print and broadcast news reports from a media database compiled by the Cornwall Public Inquiry.

The scope of the research included:

- a) An analysis of the media coverage from 1986-2004 with respect to allegations of historical abuse of young people in the Cornwall area. The study begins in 1986 when the first article appears in the database. It ends in December 2004 when the media coverage becomes focused on calls for a Public Inquiry, which is eventually established in April 2005.
- b) An examination of the changes or trends in the media coverage over the period, with a specific focus on the amount and nature of information made available to the public through the media.

## **Research Questions**

The specific Research Questions included:

- What information about allegations of historical abuse of young persons in Cornwall was communicated to the public and did it change over time?
- What key themes emerged and in turn were disseminated to the public?
- Who were the key voices and agenda-setters represented in the media coverage and how were they framed over time?
- How were issues presented: as event-centered news or larger in-depth information? Specifically, what key media genres were used to cover the allegations of abuse as they unfolded?
- What was the geographic diffusion pattern of the media coverage of the allegations?
- What were the peak coverage times from 1986-2004?

## **Key Goal:**

To provide the Cornwall Public Inquiry with information on media coverage as one element of the interactions that may have influenced institutional response and established community context to the historical allegations of child sexual abuse.

## **Methodology**

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative content analysis.<sup>1</sup> The quantitative analysis aimed to identify general trends in the nature of the media content over time, and to establish the quality of the media portrayal of allegations of historical abuse involving young persons in the Cornwall area. The qualitative analysis focused on how the issues surrounding allegations of historical abuse were represented by the media.

The study used the print and broadcast media content contained in the Commission's database, which comprises media content originating from the disclosure provided by parties involved in the unfolding of events in the Cornwall area pursuant to the Inquiry's Order of Summons. The content included mainstream media information for the most part from established local, regional and national print and broadcast outlets. A few examples of media content from smaller, specialized publications such as the *Wanderer* and the *Orator* was also contained in the database. There was also a limited amount of web news content from mainstream media, such as Canoe.com and CBC.ca.<sup>2</sup>

## **Document Sample**

In order to complete a systematic media content analysis, an unduplicated sample of media content had to be created out of the Commission's database, which included 2,710 traditional print and online articles<sup>3</sup> as well as 21 broadcast (radio and television) news clips. The database is organized for the most part with the individual news article as the unit of analysis. However, there are nine "Newspaper Articles Compendium" documents with a total of 1,378 pages of print media content that were supplied as large files of media documents.

Duplication became a key issue in the early stages of analysis because of the nature of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Content analysis is an established and standard method within media studies for describing trends in communication content (Weber, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Citizen journalism, including information reported on websites created during the period, was not included in this Report because the specific focus was media contained in the Commission database and mainstream media outlets in general. There is only one document in the database from thelinkup.com, a citizen journalism site about the allegations of historical abuse in the Cornwall area (Document 123262).

<sup>3</sup> References to 'print' media articles in this document will refer to articles originating in traditional print media outlets as well as online news articles, which started to appear in the database towards the end of the period under examination. Examples of online media content include news stories from CBC.ca and Canoe.ca.

collection method and the Inquiry's intent to become the main repository of relevant information on allegations of historical abuse in the Cornwall area. For example, there were at times as many as ten duplicates of the same scanned article in the database that had originated from a variety of public agencies, and had to be excluded before the sample could be considered ready for coding. In the interests of accuracy, the database was culled three times in an attempt to limit the duplication but maintain completeness.

Of the 2,710 newspaper documents in the Inquiry database (without including the compendium files), 1,402 documents were found to be duplicates in the first round of culling or they were published after December 31, 2004 (part of the exclusion criteria), leaving a total of 1,308 documents for analysis. A second cull was completed because of variation in the database with respect to dates and headlines. Additional duplicate articles were culled to a final total of 1,195 documents.

Within the 9 Compendium files, the largest file contained a number of PDF documents with a total of 1,378 pages of articles. The file was complicated by the fact that some pages contained more than one article. Other files contained smaller numbers of articles. Upon analysis, there was a significant amount of duplication in the articles contained within the compendium files, with many clippings repeated across files and in numerous PDFs. As a result, a third round of culling required a systematic comparison of the compendia with the initial database for extant articles. Approximately 150 unduplicated media articles, largely Letters to the Editor, were eventually retained from the compendium files, increasing the total print database for review to 1,329 documents.<sup>4</sup>

In an attempt to determine the accuracy of the Inquiry database, Factiva, one of the most comprehensive databases of Canadian print and broadcast news content, was examined for the period January 1, 1986 – December 31, 2004, using the search string 'Cornwall' and 'abuse' and 'Ont', excluding republished news. 'Ont' was used as part of the search string to differentiate Cornwall, Ont., from Cornwall, UK. It is also Canadian Press style to include 'Ont' or the provincial abbreviation in news stories involving small towns or cities in Canada. This search yielded 213 references for the period, a substantially smaller amount than the number of print documents contained in the Inquiry database. The discrepancy is largely a result of the fact that the local Cornwall newspapers are not archived in Factiva, and would only be included if a news article originating from Cornwall ran on the Canadian Press wire service. As a comparison, there were 1,033 references in the Factiva database using the search string 'Mount Cashel' and 'Newfoundland' and 'abuse' during the same time period.

---

<sup>4</sup> A final examination of the articles found a number of document files to be incomplete with second pages of articles missing, as well as dates and titles of the newspaper content missing. Other documents addressed generic issues involving pedophilia or other related concerns, and did not mention Cornwall. Exclusion criteria for the content analysis included documents not directly related to the allegations of historical abuse in the Cornwall area, and incomplete documents that could not reasonably be used in the analysis.

Finally, a significant attribute of the final sample is the seven-year period between 1986 and 1993 in which there is no media coverage. Media coverage from 1986 (which included a few news articles) contained in the database is the first mention of historical sexual abuse in Cornwall. The case involves criminal court proceedings against a Cornwall area Catholic priest, who plead guilty to four counts of gross indecency involving historical sexual abuse of young boys (*Standard-Freeholder*, 1986; Document 721623). Media accounts in the database indicate that allegations of historical child sexual abuse by priests in the Cornwall diocese resurfaced in 1993 after another case of historical child sexual abuse was raised in the media (See, for example, Document 115538, and the qualitative analysis for more detail).<sup>5</sup>

### **Broadcast Sample**

The broadcast sample of radio and television news clips was significantly smaller than the print media database. The sample contained 21 broadcast clips, including a CBC radio series that won a national investigative journalism award, a *Fifth Estate* television documentary in 1995 and a number of television newscast clips from the CTV affiliate in Ottawa and CBC Television.<sup>6</sup>

### **Qualitative Analysis**

A qualitative “framing” analysis was completed on the entire database of 1,329 unduplicated print media articles (including 224 Letters to the Editor), as well as the 21 broadcast clips, which were read thoroughly and/or reviewed digitally. This approach involved examining media content orientations by focusing on how particular events or issues were represented or “framed”, and how connections between those events and their possible interpretations or solutions were promoted.

“Frames” can be considered the conceptual structure or “framework” necessary for the communication of news and information. One of the best definitions of the concept of framing originates from Gitlin (1980) in which he describes the process as: “Frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters” (Gitlin, 1980: 6). Entman (1993) elaborates on his definition by suggesting that frames are consciously selected by journalists such that “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993: 52). “Frames” with cultural and/or emotive resonance are considered more likely

---

<sup>5</sup> Factiva was examined during the period 1986–1993, and no print media coverage of allegations of abuse in the Cornwall area was found.

<sup>6</sup> These segments are from CBC radio series *Breach of Trust: Cornwall Pedophile Ring*, which won a national investigative journalism award in 1999 (<http://www.cbc.ca/investigate/awards.htm>. Accessed 04 October 2007).

to influence opinion.

In the “framing” analysis, the broadcast coverage and Letters to the Editor were examined separately from the print news coverage in order to differentiate between mediums, as well as between “news” and “information content” and reader generated or citizen feedback. Letters to the Editor, in particular, are different from news content because they are selected by editors and news managers to uphold the media outlet’s image of “providing an open and representative forum for its readers” (Hackett & Zhao, 1998: 91). There is no established procedure within the media on which letters should be selected and which letters should be withheld. As a result, Letters reflect editorial decision-making and cannot be inferred to be a public opinion poll. They do, however, contain information about competing community understandings of an issue or event.

### **Quantitative Analysis**

A subset (slightly more than 50%) of the 1,105 print news stories – separate from the Letters to the Editor - was isolated to complete the quantitative content analysis.<sup>7</sup> Traditional media content analyses use a method referred to as a “constructed week” in order to create a representative sample of large amounts of media content. In this method, researchers randomly sample days of the year, including random Monday through Sundays, in order to account for content variation resulting from time and industry biases related to date of publication. Two constructed weeks of news content is considered statistically sufficient to allow for “reliable estimates” of stories in a year’s worth of newspaper content (Riffe, Aust and Lacy, 1993: 139). A more rigorous sampling strategy was conducted for this report in order to examine as much of the media coverage as possible.

The total sample of print news articles was organized chronologically across the period, and every second article included for analysis, creating a sample of 555 media articles.<sup>8</sup> A coding sheet with 12 variables was developed related to the goals and research questions of the inquiry and in order to make objective systematic inferences from the media texts (see Appendix A).

Variables, such as the date, are self-explanatory to some degree. Others are more complex and itemized here:

Genre/How the story is presented: examines whether the issues were presented as hard news, such as an event or news conference, or content providing in-depth information, such as a feature, which can be investigative and/or longer-form journalism.

Geographic/Region: this variable refers to the location of the news outlet identified in the news story. For example, Cornwall’s two newspapers were considered local, Ottawa’s

---

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix D for Document Numbers included in the Quantitative Sample.

<sup>8</sup> Approximately 550 articles were excluded.

two daily newspapers were referred to as “regional” and national media included *The Globe and Mail*, the *National Post* and the CBC. Canadian Press stories that ran in regional or national media were excluded if they could be found first in the Cornwall media. Specialized media, such as magazines and smaller publications, were identified separately.

Number of Sources: refers to the number of people quoted in a story. It includes whether a person was directly quoted or paraphrased, and is considered one measure of the amount of research that a reporter completed for the story.

Kinds of Sources: refers to the institutional affiliation or subjective position of the Source. Reporters are required to identify individuals quoted in a story according to their relevance and association with the issue. For example, alleged victims are identified as such along with a name – or not - in cases where the name is withheld because of legal or privacy concerns.

Facts: a number of key facts in the media coverage were identified as relevant to the allegations. They included questions about whether the media reported the existence of historical abuse of young persons or questioned whether abuse occurred; the existence of a pedophile ring; and claims that various levels of police did a competent or a poor job in the subsequent investigations.

Tone: This variable refers to the media construction of the “official” response to the allegations. “Negative” referred to critical comments or information in the story with respect to the various official agencies involved in the allegations from criminal justice agencies to other levels of government. “Neutral” involved news content that had no critical commentary, while “positive” referred to news content that included laudatory comment or information about the official response.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), an established academic software package, was used for the data analysis. The quantitative analysis focused largely on descriptive statistics and cross tabulations to provide details of trends in the nature of the media coverage.

## **Media Landscape**

Analysing the representational issues with respect to allegations of historical child sexual abuse in Cornwall inevitably relies to a large extent on the evidence of newspapers, websites and broadcasting, and as a result it is necessary to briefly describe the structure of the media in Canada. Specifically, the question of whether changes in the media coverage during the 19-year period illustrated authentic beliefs or whether they were a reflection of change of ownership or ideology of the media must be addressed.

News stories begin in local media, and if significant they are picked up by larger and surrounding regional news media, as well as national media, which include *The Globe*

and Mail, the *National Post* (launched in 1998), The Canadian Press and the three national television networks, CTV, CanWest Global and the Canadian Broadcasting Corp., as well as the national CBC Radio. The regional media in this case include for the most part the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Ottawa Sun*. These media represent a variety of ideological as well as journalistic traditions from high- to mid- market media sensibilities and down-market tabloids. Two of the newspapers, *The Globe and Mail* and the *Ottawa Citizen*, would be considered “newspapers of record” for their respective markets, while papers such as the *Ottawa Sun* occupy another segment of the media landscape generally referred to as tabloid dailies that tend to focus on a more sensational array of media content. According to the Canadian Newspaper Association, tabloid dailies accounted for 18% of the total number of newspapers in Canada as of 2006, and 24.5% of the total weekly paid circulation, leaving the bulk of the market to the broadsheets.

The media coverage contained in the Public Inquiry database suggests a wide range of media interest in the allegations of historical child sexual abuse over the years involving approximately 20 media outlets, with a significant dominance of local coverage over regional or national interest in this case. There are also examples (few) of specialized media coverage from general interest magazine, *Chatelaine*, to smaller and more specialized media, such as the *Orator* and the *Canadian Lawyer*. As indicated by Table 1.1, the majority of the information originated from local media and in particular the two main local print media outlets, *The Standard-Freeholder* and the *Seaway News*.

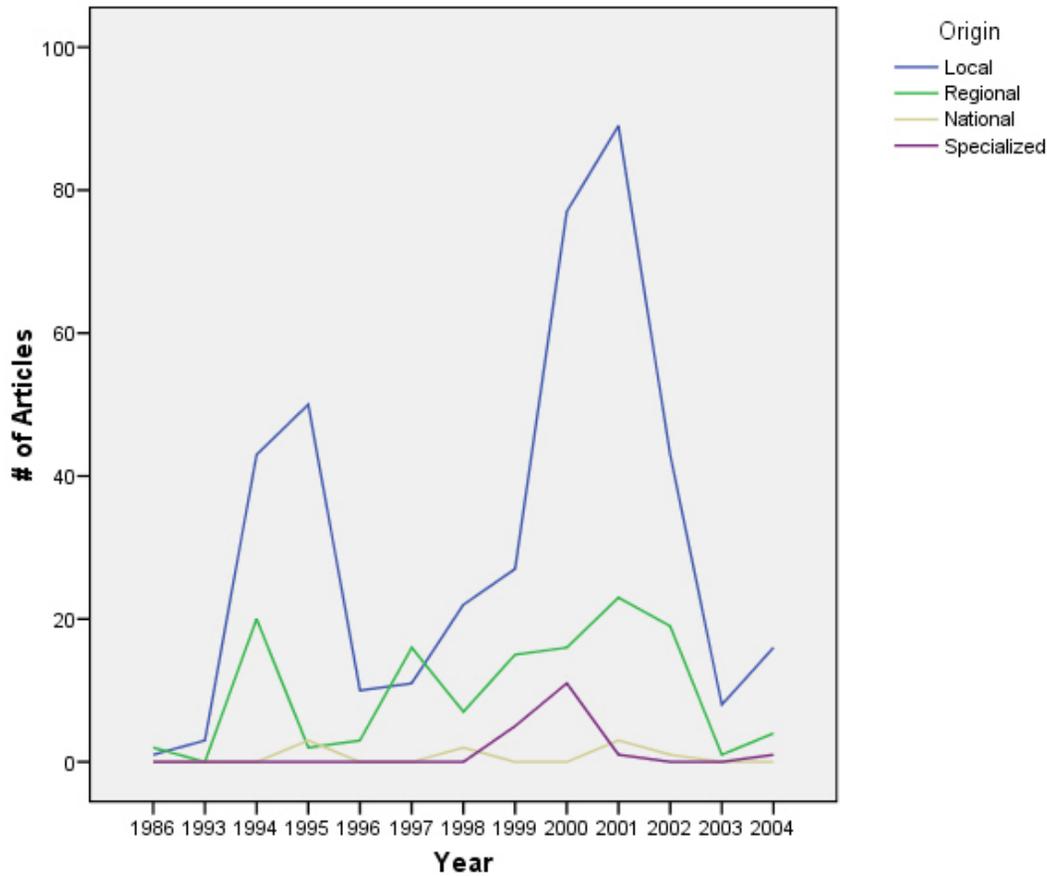
Table 1.1

**Origin of Print Media Content, 1986-2004**

|          | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|----------|-----------|---------------|
| Local    | 400       | 72.1          |
| Regional | 128       | 23.1          |
| National | 9         | 1.6           |
| Special  | 18        | 3.2           |
| Total    | 555       | 100.0         |

The study found that media representations were largely shaped by local publications, with 72.1% of content originating from local media over the 19-year period. This dominance is in some respects expected given the relevance and impact of the allegations to the community. Regional media accounted for 23.1% of the total print media coverage, while national media accounted for 1.6%, with specialized media at 3.2% of the total.

Graph 1.1 – Origin of Print News Content by Year, Region



This local dominance had ramifications on the nature of media content available to the public. For example, studies from media economics indicate a relationship between quality and the amount of investment in editorial or newsgathering functions. The “financial commitment” theory suggests that greater media competition and in turn greater financial investment in content creates higher quality ratings for news sections (Lacy and Simon, 1993). Local community newspapers vary in their level of investment in the news or information product, at the same time that they vary in revenue models from small dailies with weekly paid circulation to local weekly advertisers, which supply free distribution and access their revenue from advertisements, not advertisement and circulation revenue. These nuances can have an impact on quality of information and sophistication of newsgathering resources.

Cornwall’s two local newspapers, the *Cornwall Standard-Freeholder* and *Seaway News*, are an interesting study in media ownership trends. Ownership changes at the *Standard-Freeholder* have seen the newspaper operated by many of Canada’s leading media companies over the past two decades. Launched as an independent weekly in the mid 1800s, the *Standard-Freeholder* became a daily newspaper in the late 1940s, and was

owned by Thomson Newspapers Inc., proprietor of *The Globe and Mail*, in 1986 when a local Catholic priest plead guilty to four counts of gross indecency involving youth. It was purchased in 1996 by Southam-Hollinger, the largest newspaper chain in Canada at the time<sup>9</sup>, and sold to Osprey Media in 2001. In 2007, the *Standard-Freeholder* was purchased by Quebecor Media Inc., which owns the Sun chain of newspapers. According to 2006 data from the Canadian Newspaper Association, the *Standard-Freeholder* has an average daily circulation of 14,280.

The *Seaway News* was founded in 1985 by Dick Aubry and Rick Shaver, and purchased by Transcontinental Inc. in August 2007.<sup>10</sup> According to the Canadian Community Newspaper Association, the *Seaway News* had a controlled circulation (free) of 34,900 for the last reported period of November – April 2007. As an independent controlled circulation weekly, the *Seaway News* would have had limited reach outside the Cornwall area. Relevant or interesting news content from the *Standard-Freeholder*, however, would have been distributed across the country by the Canadian Press wire service because it was a daily newspaper and a member of the wire service cooperative.

Ownership shifts during this period at the *Standard-Freeholder*, which would have had the largest reach beyond the Cornwall area, would likely have affected content and newsgathering practices largely from a resource perspective - if at all. Small daily and community newspapers that are part of larger media groups are often considered for their revenue generation potential as well as training grounds for young journalists, providing lower paid entry-level jobs that tend to be transient in nature. As such, these media properties tend to be seen more as financial assets than news agenda setters, a role left to the larger regional dailies.

### **Quantitative Print Media Content Analysis Findings**

First, the analysis indicates that there were peak periods of media interest in the case, with the key year of 2001 accounting for 20.9% of the media coverage for the entire 18-year period. The next peak year was 2000 (18.7%), followed by 2002 (11.4%) and 1994 (11.4%). These peaks correspond with key dates in the history of the allegations with the Leduc trial and stay of proceedings in 2001, initial calls for a Public Inquiry and Perry Dunlop's resignation in 2000, the end of Project Truth and its charges against 15 people on 115 counts of sexual abuse in 2002, and media coverage of the 1992 complainant's statement to police and the financial settlement in 1994.

Table 1.2 shows the results of the print media news content analysis by genre, with the largest proportion of media content involving traditional hard news stories, organized as an “inverted pyramid” of information with the most important content at the top (67.2%). These results present a picture of the information landscape as focused on basic news and

---

<sup>9</sup> John Saunders and Casey Mahood. “New layout, same story”, *The Globe and Mail*. 04/05/1996: B1.

<sup>10</sup> “Transcontinental Media acquires Seaway News”, *Stockwatch*. 03/08/2007.

information content. Examples of common news stories across the period included daily accounts of the numerous criminal trials of alleged perpetrators, the announcement of charges against specific individuals, and press conferences or interviews with politicians about elements of the allegations and the successive police investigations. This genre forms the mainstay of most traditional print media, and according to research in the United States tends to originate for the most part from official sources and or planned media events because they are considered more reportable according to journalistic norms and practices (Bennett, 2001).

TABLE 1.2

Print News Content by Genre, 1986 - 2004

|                     | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------|
| News                | 373       | 67.2          |
| Brief               | 39        | 7.0           |
| Feature/<br>Indepth | 29        | 5.2           |
| Editorial           | 36        | 6.5           |
| Column              | 78        | 14.1          |
| Total               | 555       | 100.0         |

In addition to the basic hard news story, only 5.2% of stories involved longer-form journalism or features. Finally, 20.6% of the information over the period or one in five media stories was opinion content. According to Table 1.2, these stories included columns (14.1%) and newspaper editorials (6.5%). The columns for the most part originated from the two Cornwall newspapers and their two main columnists, who addressed the problem and allegations from opposing perspectives – often trading barbs with each other in print.<sup>11</sup> Some columns also originated from regional and national media including two columns from the *Ottawa Sun* in 1999 that refer to some relevant details about the allegations not addressed in other media (*Ottawa Sun*; Documents 123364; and 123363. Editorials included content from local newspapers as well as the *Ottawa Citizen* and other regional daily newspapers.

Columns and editorials are traditionally used as vehicles to inject in-depth analysis and opinion into the news agenda, in addition to the “objective” news and information provided by news outlets. Best practices news and opinion writing focuses on evidence-based reporting methods and argumentation as means to analyse and describe issues or events in the public realm (Meyer, 2002).<sup>12</sup> This includes a rigorous approach to

<sup>11</sup> See Documents 728752 and 721017 from summer 1998 for an example of the nature of the exchange between the two local columnists.

<sup>12</sup> For an accessible (1991 version) summary of Philip Meyer’s book *Precision Journalism*, see <http://www.unc.edu/~pmeyer/book/>.

journalistic methods, such as confirming the accuracy of information before making it available in the public realm, practicing transparency with respect to whether the information is speculation or based on evidence, and then identifying the source of that evidence.

Proponents of high-quality civic journalism such as Philip Meyer, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel argue that only through best practices and “precision” journalism can media fulfill their role in facilitating democracy and the public good (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001; Meyer, 2002). Kovach and Rosenstiel go so far as to say that the discipline of “verification” is what separates journalism from “entertainment, propaganda, fiction, or art” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001: 71). Examples of opinion content from some local columns in this sample suggest that journalistic best practices were not followed in a number of instances. Indeed, examples from the database indicate that opinion content included speculation, rumour and hyperbole without systematic and evidence-based argumentation in attempts to make sense of the allegations of historical abuse of young persons in the Cornwall area.

For example, one local columnist quoted the lawyer for an accused priest retelling a conversation with his client: “Listen we’re friends but I’m talking to you as your lawyer – did you do it?” The reply was a firm, ‘Malcolm, I’m innocent.’ ‘I believe you, said the lawyer’ ” (*Standard-Freeholder* 1994; Document 728391). In another example, a columnist quoted an “old friend, a former high-ranking U.S. Army intelligence officer who knows a thing or two about analyzing hand-written letters, an art he refined in the espionage game during the Cold War”, who allegedly provided a personality profile of the author of an anonymous letter delivered to that columnist’s newspaper related to Project Truth (*Standard-Freeholder* 1998; Document 720995). In both instances, the journalism fails to seek multiple witnesses or sources with respect to the event, and to examine many sides for reaction. According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001), the only way that journalists can strip away “rumour, the gossip, the failed memory, the manipulative agendas”, as well as the “limits of your own perception and your own experience” to try to “capture something as accurately as possible” is to employ objectivity and fairness and balance of method (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001: 70-71).

The remaining news content (12.2%) included briefs (7%), which are short news stories of less than three paragraphs, and features (5.2%) or longer-form/in-depth journalism. Some examples of responsible longer-form journalism originated from *The Globe and Mail* as well as the *Ottawa Citizen* (See Appendix 4). *Chatelaine* completed a long feature on Perry and Helen Dunlop (Document 112311), the *Ottawa Sun* completed a special report on abuse in the Catholic Church (Document 722314) and three long features on allegations of historical child sexual abuse in the Cornwall area are contained in the *Orator* (see, for example, Document 112312). These longer-form articles as well as a few other articles in the entire media corpus contained attempts to provide context, which was largely absent from the basic news stories.

Table 1.3 examines the number of sources contained in an article or story as one measure of the quality of news content. Studies of media content over the previous century indicate that newspaper content became increasingly complex over the period, moving from single-source news stories to articles with numerous sources and more rigorous reporting methods (Barnhurst and Mutz, 1997; Young, 2005).

Table 1.3

**# of Sources in Print News Content, 1986-2004**

|       | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------------|
| 0     | 63        | 11.4          |
| 1     | 219       | 39.5          |
| 2     | 169       | 30.5          |
| 3     | 93        | 16.8          |
| 4     | 11        | 2.0           |
| Total | 555       | 100.0         |

In this case, more than half of the news content over the entire period (50.9%) referenced no source or a single source in the story. This suggests that in more than half of the news and information stories only one source – or no source – was relied upon in order to report on complex and important allegations of historical sexual abuse in the public realm involving numerous individuals in a small community. Almost one-third (30.5%) of stories quoted two sources, while only 18.8% of stories quoted three or four sources. The result is a body of information that relies on a narrow, limited range of research and knowledge for its content. This is important for the public because news content has been considered the product of a transaction between sources and journalists, such that the quality of those sources and their relationship to the journalist are relevant to the nature and quality of media information (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1989). Elements that further affect this transaction include the fact that news sources who make it into the media tend to share “core values” with journalists, according to Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1989) limiting the available knowledge base. News content with few identified sources is even more constraining and has a negative impact on the community, as well as citizens’ ability to make sense of complex issues or events.

Table 1.4 portrays the main media sources in the coverage. Studies of media content often suggest that the sources heard first or the first few paragraphs of a news story have the most impact on audiences and set the tone for the rest of the article. The most common first news source throughout the period was a government official (29.7%), which included politicians, judges and Crown Prosecutors. Judges generally do not make direct comments to the media but were quoted as initial sources from their statements in court. This is not surprising as studies have found that high-profile institutions and individuals, as well as individuals in positions of authority, such as politicians, tend to

have routine access to the media (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1989). However, a focus on one type of source can result in news content that is ideologically or institutionally biased.

Table 1.4

**First Source in Print Media Coverage, 1986-2004**

|                     | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Gov't official      | 146       | 29.7          |
| Alleged victim      | 66        | 13.4          |
| Project Truth       | 61        | 12.4          |
| Other Source        | 43        | 8.7           |
| Catholic Church     | 39        | 7.9           |
| Perry Dunlop        | 32        | 6.5           |
| Cornwall Police     | 32        | 6.5           |
| Alleged perpetrator | 22        | 4.5           |
| Citizen's group     | 19        | 3.9           |
| Social Agency       | 15        | 3.0           |
| Other media         | 15        | 3.0           |
| Expert              | 2         | .4            |
| Total               | 492       | 100.0         |

\*Total N in Table 1.4 is 492 because as indicated in Table 1.3, 63 articles had no sources.

After government officials, the second most prominent first source in the database articles involved alleged victims (13.4%) followed by representatives of Project Truth (12.4%). However, combining both Project Truth and Cornwall city police totals almost one-fifth of the first sources (18.9%). Interestingly, Perry Dunlop was the first source (6.5%) almost as often as a representative from the Catholic Church (7.9%), which indicates that Dunlop was able to establish himself as a main agenda-setter or “claims maker” in media discourse and to establish a relationship with journalists. It also suggests an inability or disinterest by media to access information from the Catholic Church and/or to hold it and its representatives accountable. Finally, the extremely small percentage of the news agenda devoted to experts, defined as academics, psychologists

and other specialists in historical abuse claims, indicates a lack of depth and expertise about the psychological, social, cultural and institutional costs of this kind of social problem to a community.

Table 1.5 examines key facts referenced in the media coverage. The first fact referenced most often in the database included the fact that a pedophile ring existed (27.3%), followed by criticism against Cornwall Police (20.8%) and finally that there had been some sort of conspiracy against victims (15.9%).

Table 1.5

**First Fact Cited in Print Media, 1986-2004**

|                                | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Abuse ring                     | 79        | 27.3          |
| Cornwall police - not thorough | 60        | 20.8          |
| Conspiracy vs. victims         | 46        | 15.9          |
| Judicial system - not thorough | 29        | 10.0          |
| Project Truth - not thorough   | 26        | 9.0           |
| Abuse claims unsure            | 24        | 8.3           |
| Suicide/perpetrator            | 7         | 2.4           |
| Suicide - victim               | 6         | 2.1           |
| Project Truth - thorough       | 5         | 1.7           |
| Judicial system - thorough     | 4         | 1.4           |
| Cornwall police - thorough     | 3         | 1.0           |
| Total                          | 289       | 100.0         |

\*Note total N = 289 because some articles referred to none of the facts.

These facts conform to journalistic norms that highlight conflict and “sensational” media content as the focus or top of a news story, such as the existence of a pedophile ring. Other key points of interest include the silences or inattention to relevant facts, such as the suicides of perpetrators, which were mentioned in 2.4% of the stories. As well, even

when mentioned there is a discrepancy on the number of suicides that occurred over the years, as well as confusion about the cause of death of a number of people involved in the investigations. Journalistic norms preclude media coverage of suicide such that in this case, these norms may have hindered full reporting on issues related to the allegations of historical abuse of young persons.<sup>13</sup>

Table 1.6 analyses the tone of the media coverage with respect to official response to the allegations of historical child sexual abuse.

Table 1.6

**Tone of News Content: Positive, Negative, or Neutral**

|          | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|----------|-----------|---------------|
| Positive | 41        | 7.4           |
| Negative | 361       | 65.0          |
| Neutral  | 153       | 27.6          |
| Total    | 555       | 100.0         |

For the most part, the tone in the news stories was negative (65%), followed by neutral (27.6%) and then positive (7.4%). This is reflected in the numerous media stories itemizing criticism of official players and agencies in investigating the allegations of historical child sexual abuse, such as Cornwall city police and Project Truth. Also, by definition news tends to reflect “negative” changes in the status quo, so a well-run police investigation would likely not make the media agenda.

**Qualitative Framing Analysis**

Key “frames” that emerged in the media coverage of allegations of historical abuse involving young persons in the Cornwall area included: (1) positioning Cornwall city police and other levels of the criminal justice system as responsible for the social problem, or if not responsible at least culpable throughout the entire period; (2) construction of the issue of historical allegations of abuse of young persons according to parameters determined in part by key sources which included largely government officials (including Garry Guzzo), police officers (including Perry Dunlop), victims and

---

<sup>13</sup> According to the Poynter Institute, a well-respected resource centre for journalists in the United States, there is an unwritten rule that media tend not to report on suicide to avoid inspiring copycats, which misrepresents the amount of suicide in a community. [http://www.poynter.org/content/content\\_view.asp?id=54176&sid=32](http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=54176&sid=32). Accessed 15 October 2007.

citizens groups in the later period. That is, which voices were chosen, the legitimacy afforded the speaker and the types of arguments made were framed in a way consistent with their claims as opposed to other sources; (3) construction of the allegations and issues as discrete new events, engendering fairly uncritical and under-researched print media content that persisted throughout the period, such that citizens were unable to determine truth from gossip and innuendo.

The frame of ineffective policing originated in 1993, was substantiated to varying degrees by a number reports that were re-presented in the media, and recurred until the Public Inquiry began in April 2005. For example, media accounts in 1994 reported that Ottawa police completed an investigation of the Cornwall police handling of a complaint by alleged victim David John Silmsler (DS) in 1992, and concluded there was no collusion but a “noticeable lack of senior management direction and support through the investigation” (*Standard-Freeholder* 1994; Document 115553). In 1995, a Solicitor General’s audit of the Cornwall police service described the department as “rife with conflict” in 1993 (*Standard-Freeholder* 1995; Document 723050). In addition to these criticisms, media reported extensively on Perry Dunlop’s charges under the Police Services Act, as well as when he was cleared of those charges (*The Globe and Mail* 1995; Document 722226). The 1995 attempt obstruction of justice charges against the lawyer for accused priest Father Charles MacDonald were also placed in the general category of police ineffectiveness. Broadcast media further inflated these concerns by representing police in one news story as either “incompetent” or “most botched up” involving in a “massive coverup” in their handling of two investigations of allegations of historical abuse (CBC Newsworld, 2000; Document 713699).

Concerns about police ineffectiveness continued towards the end of the period, shifting from Cornwall police to the Ontario Provincial Police operation Project Truth and the subsequent criminal trials. Media reports cited a sole guilty plea in 2002 - out of a total of 15 people charged and 115 counts of sexual abuse – as evidence of further ineffectiveness. Few articles in the database referred to the second conviction from Project Truth of Rev. Paul Lapierre, who was found guilty in Montreal in relation to a 40-year-old indecent assault on a young man and sentenced to three years’ probation, according to the media report (*Standard-Freeholder*, 2004: Document 123110).

The frame of ineffective police action is common in media coverage of complex or major crimes, such as serial murder. Media coverage of the serial murders by Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka in southern Ontario in the 1990s, as well as the current serial murder trial against Robert Pickton in Vancouver constructed the social problems as related to ineffective policing (Jiwani and Young, 2006). This larger “legal” frame, which grew to include the courts and references to the criminal justice system, became a main frame through which complex social problems (in this case, allegations of historical sexual abuse) were seen. Critcher (2004) examined an overview of academic studies of the media coverage of child sexual abuse across a number of national contexts, including the United States and the United Kingdom, and found that complex social problems such as child abuse tend to include some shared interpretations or representations including critical attention to health, social work and police personnel. Critcher (2003) itemizes

what he describes as “the politically motivated selection of targets for media campaigns”, which attempts to focus blame on social agencies such as police officials for their inability to “prevent” the abuse, while abusers, largely male adults in family households or well-known to the family, are not held accountable (Critchler, 2003: 98).

The frame of ineffective police action in Cornwall was facilitated to a large extent by the sources deemed legitimate and placed in prominent positions at the top of news stories. Jenkins (1992) and Best (1994) argue that child abuse has existed throughout history and that the nature and content of media coverage of specific cases at specific times becomes a reflection of “influential claims makers”, each with a set of interests and/or political agendas. For example, DS’s allegations became a prime source in the early media coverage in 1993 when his claims about historical abuse and a financial settlement with the diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall were made public. As the story unfolded, media accounts added DS’s claims that he was abused by “another Cornwall man” (*Standard-Freeholder*, 1994: Document 722156), which eventually became a Cornwall area probation officer, who according to a media report from the *Ottawa Citizen* in 1994 committed “suicide” in “mysterious circumstances”, (*Ottawa Citizen*, 1994; Document 123254; *Ottawa Citizen*, 1994; Document 722199). These details and journalistic investigation of issues at the probation office, guidelines about allegations of abuse from Corrections were not followed up.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time the frame of police and Catholic Church cover-up received more fuel when another dominant frame of the “folk hero” emerged as a Cornwall police officer, Constable Perry Dunlop, blew the whistle on the local police and the lack of adequate investigation into allegations of historical abuse. Dunlop became the centre of sustained local media attention and was the eventual catalyst for national media coverage including large news features stories by *The Globe and Mail* and *Chatelaine*, as well as a central appearance in a *Fifth Estate* documentary in 1995. Indeed, a significant amount of media coverage focused on Dunlop, who emerged as a main claims maker as the narrative unfolded. Dunlop gained such notoriety that his disclosure of numerous files and interviews with alleged victims to the OPP marked a key shift in the nature of the media coverage, changing the discourse from a discussion of a few disparate and unlinked cases of alleged historical sexual abuse into the existence of a “pedophile clan” or “pedophile ring” (*Ottawa Sun*, 1997; Document 115630; *Ottawa Citizen*, 1997; 115631). He continued to maintain his role as a claims maker through his resignation in 2000.

The last major groups to frame the nature of the media coverage included lawyers and court officials in the numerous trials originating out of Project Truth as well as the

---

<sup>14</sup> Incidents were, however, briefly mentioned in a number of reports. The *Standard-Freeholder* reported on one criminal case in 1995, in which a Cornwall probation officer, Nelson Barque was sentenced to four months in jail and 18 months probation after pleading guilty to one count of indecent assault on a male (Document 115584). In another example, an *Ottawa Sun* column referred to probation officer Ken Seguin “who was high on the OPP’s potential perpetrator list, committed suicide on Nov. 24, 1993, without ever being charged” (*Ottawa Sun*, 1999; Document 123364).

citizen's groups – and politicians (including Garry Guzzo) - who emerged and became active towards the end of the period, calling for a Public Inquiry.

These sources and their claims were presented largely as discrete news events, resulting from news conferences, court appearances, police investigations and reaction to media events. This treatment both legitimized and re-presented fairly uncritical journalistic research, while other evidence was left under or/ undeveloped. Mainstream media generally neglected to investigate or provide in-depth analysis on the nature of the problems related to claims about police ineffectiveness. Media reports also failed to elaborate on tensions and context already in the public realm, either through documents released by various policing accountability agencies or by comparing the allegations in Cornwall to other contemporaneous cases involving abuse of young persons. For example, in 1999, media reports (*Seaway News* 1999; Document 730517) were still referring to concerns about “how it was handled” by Cornwall police, suggesting implicitly or explicitly that fixing the police was part of the solution and that there was still a lack of clarity or uncertainty about the role that local police played in the allegations.

More analytical and contextual information content about the local police and the investigations, as well as the legal issues involved in investigating historical allegations of abuse about would have allowed audiences to be more discerning in their assessment of the social problem. There were also few attempts to link issues in Cornwall with multi-victim abuse cases in London, Ont., Project Jericho in Prescott, Ont., and Mount Cashel in Newfoundland. A number of articles made reference to Mount Cashel and other prominent sexual abuse cases unfolding in the 1990s, but neglected to consider the connections on a larger research level or how the increased media attention to sexual abuse during this period might have played a role in the construction of the problem by raising awareness and helping victims to identify and to speak out about their victimization.<sup>15</sup>

Another example of the need for greater precision in journalistic research involved media coverage of Perry Dunlop's report to the OPP indicating that a pedophile “ring” had been operating in the Cornwall area. These claims were not verified by other sources or police agencies at the time, despite the fact that further corroboration would be required in a best practices and objective journalism research model given that Dunlop had become part of the story (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001). Jenkins (1992) argues that claims makers raise the stakes in child abuse cases by suggesting that real physical harm results from sexual offences and that the crimes are the result of organized groups. This escalation is seen as creating the likelihood of encouraging official sanctions, making it easier to mount a campaign for social change.

---

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, a number of scholars (Best, 1994; Critcher, 2002; Kitzinger, 1999; Kitzinger, 2001) who examine a rise in media representations or interest in the sexual abuse of children and pedophilia in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Finally, there were a number of problematic silences in the media coverage. The first and most important is that a Cornwall-area priest was convicted of historical sexual abuse in 1986, a fact that was not followed up extensively and is only referred to in a limited number of media accounts in 1993, 1994 and 1995.<sup>16</sup> The 1986 conviction on four counts of gross indecency of Father Gilles Deslauriers, a Roman Catholic priest formerly of Nativity Parish, changes the media constructed periodization of the social problem in the Cornwall area and would have opened up a number of other venues for journalistic investigation. For example, one of the accounts that refers to the 1986 conviction<sup>17</sup> in 1994 documents a victim's discussion with the Bishop at the time, which indicates accountability issues on the part of the Diocese that were never followed up:

Benoit [Brisson] says he complained to Bishop Eugene LaRocque about the abuse. The bishop promised him the priest would be removed from parish work and sent for treatment. But not long after, friends saw the priest working at a Hull parish. That's when Benoit decided to go public and lay charges, saying he wanted to make sure the priest didn't abuse others (*Standard-Freeholder*, 1994; Document 722171)

It would also have changed the construction of ineffective criminal justice response to the degree that one early case had been successfully investigated and prosecuted, with the caveat that the number of counts of gross indecency Father Deslauriers pleaded guilty to decreased from initial charges that were significantly higher (*Standard-Freeholder*, 1986; Document 721623).<sup>18</sup>

Other areas that lacked sufficient media attention and rigor involved research into the clergy and Roman Catholic Church. Few print media articles examined the alleged perpetrators or the Church bureaucracy, leaving an area that is commonly addressed in media coverage of major social problems uncharacteristically silent. This inattention (which is addressed to a slightly greater degree in some of the broadcast media coverage) resulted in further lack of information in the public realm. However, as is often the case in social problems involving possible criminal prosecution, institutional sources, alleged victims and perpetrators as well as journalists, may be legally constrained (or feel constrained) in their ability to publicly address allegations contemporaneously.

---

<sup>16</sup> For example, it is referred to in 1993 in the context of media reportage on what is constructed by media outlets as a "cover-up" by Cornwall police and the Catholic Church of historical abuse and the Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall (*Seaway News* 1993; Document 115538).

<sup>17</sup> There is discrepancy in this report and the 1986 account with respect to the number of charges. In 1986, the media suggest that Deslauriers was convicted on four counts of gross indecency, while this account only refers to his 16 charges.

<sup>18</sup> According to the article, Deslauriers was initially charged with eight counts of indecent assault and eight counts of gross indecency, which took place between 1978 and 1984 involving nine Cornwall males aged 17 – 21 years of age.

## **Broadcast Media Framing Analysis**

Broadcast coverage framed the allegations in similar ways to print media focusing on police inefficiency and event-centered news content. A key difference is that broadcast media appeared to play more of an agenda-setting role than the print media. An Ottawa television station was instrumental in raising the issue of the 1992 complaint by DS and his financial settlement with the Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall to the regional media. The news story of the settlement gained larger media reach in January 1994 after a CTV News affiliate in Ottawa (CJOH-TV) aired information from the complainant's statement to police, which was then picked up and followed by local and other regional media such as the *Ottawa Citizen*. CBC Radio was also one of the few media outlets to attempt to examine the allegations in-depth, with five reporters winning a national investigative journalism award in 1999 for their efforts.

Indeed, broadcast media, while continuing to use similar sources such as police, alleged victims, Perry Dunlop and some politicians, was also the only media to refer to the religious context in Cornwall and the existence of powerful interest groups in the area: "Going to church is a big activity. Two out of three people are Catholic in Cornwall" (*Fifth Estate*, 1995; 716075). The same documentary also supplied compelling narrative and community context about the impact of an investigation into a local priest and his eventual removal from the parish: "Ten months later church leaders removed Father Charlie Macdonald. His parishioners were told nothing. 'He was removed from the parish house quickly, sort of a middle-of-the-night thing'" (*Fifth Estate*, 1995: 716075).

Finally, the CBC Radio investigative series *Breach of Trust* by four senior journalists reported that it found the existence of a pedophile ring and at least 50 people who claimed they were sexually abused by 20 men, that at least "three suspects had committed suicide" and referred to "old photos, church records and other documents" that it had accessed as evidence. Unfortunately, this information and the CBC investigative series (as well as its sources) were not available in print or transcript for audiences and other media (CBC Radio; Document 713703). Access to documents and sources of verification for these claims, particularly records from the Catholic Church, would have provided meaningful background and rigor for audiences to make sense of the problem.

## **Letters to the Editor**

Letters to the Editor, which cover 1994 – 2004 largely from Cornwall-area newspapers, provided insight and competing information on issues not always evident in the mainstream media coverage. The editorial selection process was also apparent to some degree, as a subset of Letters tended to originate from a small group of respondents.

Letters framed the social problem in terms of conflict on an individual, cultural/religious and institutional level, with detail and emotion not found in the majority of media coverage. The conflicts tended to revolve around religious affiliation (a number of letters

were written on behalf of the Catholic Church and local diocese in the face of the settlement with DS, which suggest that members of the Church were struggling to make sense of the historic abuse), discussions about the role of Perry Dunlop (the majority of the letters were pro-Dunlop and his actions), and personal disputes that indicated a rising level of concern and suspicion in Cornwall following the successive investigations. The letters included a mix of gossip and random information, from a column titled Scuttlebutt in the *Seaway News* to readers writing about concerns regarding financial donations to the Catholic Church in the wake of the allegations of historical abuse and a settlement with an alleged victim. One reader response column in 1995 reported on feedback from a two-hour call-in to the *Standard-Freeholder* on Perry Dunlop. The newspaper received 161 calls in the period and printed about 40 responses - all positive and supportive - about Dunlop's decision to contact the Children's Aid Society.

Generally the tone was emotive, with residents either staking a position and siding with one of the parties, or expressing concern about the general quality of information available to them. For example, an editorial in 1998 said: "rumours are flying around town, about who will be the next prominent Cornwall person to be charged in the sex abuse scandal the OPP has dubbed Project Truth. Coffee clutches and the workplace are unfortunately fuelling the rumour mill" (*Standard-Freeholder*; Document 720994). A long Letter to the Editor of the *Standard-Freeholder* in 1999 suggested that gossip about a shortlist of people who were being investigated by Project Truth was getting out of hand (Document 720212).

As I sat at the hairdresser's one day, I overheard one client tell another of two names which were going to be added to 'the list' [she had a friend in high places who knew for sure]. The story took an interesting twist when the 'know-it-all' left and her seat was taken by another client. I could not believe when I heard the story repeated to this new client, along with three additional names. At this point I stood up and told them that what they were doing was dangerous ... (Document 720212).

Allegations about the problem of rumour and innuendo continued in later letters, which also cited a local website as a centre of concern. "The anti-Catholic animus displayed by the authors of the Web site is another distasteful ugly factor in their smear campaign (*Standard-Freeholder*, 2000; Document 720312).

A final theme evident in numerous letters involved concern about the quality of the media coverage, in addition to requests for more thorough information and reportage. For example, a Letter to the Editor in 1999 complained, "once again our local daily newspaper has gone one step too far" (*Standard-Freeholder*; Document 737845, bp 7159451). Another letter criticized *Seaway News* columnist Bob Roth, saying: "In my wildest dreams I could not believe that he would stoop as low as to state that the clergy, evidently from previous writings, from the Bishop down, are Satanic" (Unknown media; Document 720972). Many letters also cited lack of adequate information about the allegations and issues in the public realm, and specifically the media. One letter, in 1998, requested more information about how the media covers sexual abuse trials, in particular,

with respect to “publication bans” (Media outlet unknown; Document 737845, bp 7159256). Another said: “We are too long on feelings and too short on facts”, according to one reader in 1998 (*Seaway News*; Document 720978).

## Conclusion

*... the community has only heard part of the story with many of the facts obscured from public view, and equally important -- and some of my colleagues have already referred to this -- the events in Cornwall have given rise to a truly astonishing amount of rumour and innuendo. The community has been unable to distinguish fact from fiction, sensational journalism and third-hand gossip from the real facts of what took place and how were allegations investigated.*

(Wardle Opening Statement, 2006).<sup>19</sup>

This report has systematically examined the print and broadcast media content compiled by the Cornwall Public Inquiry from 1986 - 2004. Its main finding is that the majority of news and information content originated from the local media, used few sources, and neglected to supply the necessary context and in-depth investigation that would reflect a best practices journalism model. In general, there was too little fact and too much conjecture. When there were relevant facts they were not presented in a coherent narrative – in one place - for audiences to understand given the complexity of the individual, structural and institutional issues involved. Factors that may have affected this include lack of resources at the local media level, inadequate journalism training in the coverage of historical sexual abuse claims and limited media accountability mechanisms for small communities. There were notable exceptions to this finding in a number of media, including CBC Radio, but they were unfortunately few and far between.

Other key findings include:

- The main information about allegations of historical abuse of young persons communicated to the public was framed within a “legal” context of ineffective policing. This is not to claim that police agencies did not share responsibility in the problem as indicated by a number of media reports.
- In Cornwall, police – not the Catholic Church or institutions such as Corrections in relation to a number of allegations (and one conviction) involving probation officers - become the main media target for public complaint and critique over the period.

---

<sup>19</sup> <http://cornwallinquiry.irri.net/Oct-03-06/cornwall51oct0306.pdf>. (pp. 37-38).

- Key voices and agenda-setters represented in the media coverage included government officials (including Garry Guzzo), police (including Perry Dunlop), victims and citizen's groups.
- Issues were presented largely as event-centered news - not larger in-depth information – that limited the amount of meaningful information available to the public. As a result, there was inadequate journalistic rigor applied to government institutions and their role.
- The geographic diffusion pattern of the media coverage of the allegations largely originated in local media, with regional and national media showing sporadic interest in the case. Regional media became interested in the case in 1994, while national media first became interested in the case in 1995 as a result of Perry Dunlop's charges under the Police Services Act.
- Peak coverage times from 1986-2004 included four key years: the Leduc trial and stay of proceedings in 2001, initial calls for a Public Inquiry and Perry Dunlop's resignation in 2000, the end of Project Truth and its charges against 15 people on 115 counts of sexual abuse in 2002, and media coverage of the 1992 complainant's statement to police and the financial settlement in 1994.
- Finally, one of the most important issues with the media coverage involves the largely incorrect media periodization of the incidence of historical abuse in the Cornwall area. Media coverage for the most part constructed events around allegations – unproven in court - about DS's 1992 complaint and subsequent financial settlement. This focus neglected the fact that a Cornwall-area priest had been convicted of historical sexual abuse in 1986 involving incidents that occurred in the 1970s, a fact that was not followed up extensively and is only referred to in a limited number of media accounts.

What could have been done?

There is an old newsroom adage that engaging in “hindsight headline writing” after deadline is better left alone. Given the importance of the social problems in this case and their continuing relevance to the news agenda, it is worth considering what might have been had journalistic best practices been more evident.

To do this, I refer to rigorous and exemplary journalism from a small town in Idaho that experienced similar allegations around historical abuse and a Boy Scout leader in the 1990s. The local newspaper approached allegations of historical abuse with a sustained focus, even though it faced similar community dynamics apparent in the Cornwall area. One news media organization, *The Post-Register* in Idaho Falls, Idaho, was able to provide in-depth research (see Appendix B and C for the series of articles and editorial comment) that exposed the abuse and the collusion in the Boy Scout management after accessing key document evidence of abuse – that went beyond the number of victims

identified in initial news accounts - and cover-up (that reached into the senior management of the Boy Scouts).<sup>20</sup> Here is an account of the newspaper's experience:

*Some days we felt like one of those plucky anglers in a small boat who solidly hooks a halibut, only to be beaten to death by the thrashing brute when it's hauled aboard. The Post Register is a wee dory of a newspaper: With 26,000 daily circulation, it's not buoyed by any corporate chain and has an opinion page often reviled in this livid corner of reddest Idaho for its reliable dissent. Last year, by exposing Boy Scout pedophiles and those who failed to kick them out of the scouting program, we energized three of our community's big forces against us, including those most able to punish our newspaper – the community's majority religion, the richest guys in town, and the conservative machine that controls Idaho. First came the tip: A pedophile caught at a local scout camp in 1997 had not had two victims, as we reported at the time; he had dozens. When we went to the local courthouse to look for the civil suit filed by these victims, the clerks (and the computers) said there was no such case. We later learned that the national Boy Scouts of America and its local Grand Teton Council had hired two of Idaho's best-connected law firms to seal the files and hide what came to be known as the Brad Stowell case. The Post Register went to court in late 2004, and by January 2005, we'd dragged the case file into the light of day and read it from beginning to end. ("The Story Behind the Story", Nieman Reports, Summer 2006)<sup>21</sup>*

In this case, the Idaho newspaper solved the crime for the community. In Cornwall, journalists barely scratched the surface and let one of the largest stories in the community remain clouded in rumours and allegations for more than two decades. It shows that best practices journalism matters for accountability and the ability of citizens to make sense of important issues in their community.

---

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.postregister.com/scouts\\_honor/index.php](http://www.postregister.com/scouts_honor/index.php). Accessed 5 October 2007.

<sup>21</sup> For full story, see: <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/06-2NRsummer/p95-0602-miller.html>. Accessed 5 October 2007.

## References

\*Refers to articles included with the Report. Books were obviously excluded.

\*\*Refers to articles only available in Print at the University of British Columbia library

\*Barnhurst, Kevin and Diana Mutz. 1997. "American Journalism and the Decline of Event-Centered Reporting". *Journal of Communication*. 47 (4): 27-53.

Bennett, Lance. 2001. *News: The Politics of Illusion*. Fourth Edition. New York: Longman.

Best, Joel. 1994. *Threatened Children*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Critcher, Chas. 2003. *Moral Panics and the Media*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Ericson, Richard, Patricia Baranek and Janet Chan. 1989. *Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

\*Entman, Robert, M. 1993. "Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm". *Journal of Communication* 43 (4): 51-8.

Gitlin, Todd. 1980. *The Whole World is watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*. Berkeley, CA: Open University Press.

Hackett, Robert and Yuezhi Zhao. 1998. *Sustaining democracy: Journalism and the politics of objectivity*. Toronto: Garamond Press.

Jenkins, Philip. 1992. *Intimate Enemies: Moral Panics in Contemporary Great Britain*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

\*Jiwani, Yasmin and Mary Lynn Young. 2006. "Missing and Murdered Women: Reproducing Marginality in News Discourse". *Canadian Journal of Communication*. Vol. 31: 895-917.

Kitzinger, Jenny. 2001. "Transformations of Public and Private Knowledge: Audience Reception, Feminism and the Experience of Childhood Sexual Abuse". *Feminist Media Studies*, Vol. 1 (No. 1): 91-104.

Kitzinger, Jenny. 1999. The ultimate neighbour from hell? The media representation of paedophilia, in B. Franklin (ed) *Social Policy, the Media and Misrepresentation*. London: Routledge.

Kovach, Bill and Tom Rosenstiel. 2001. *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Lacy, Stephen and Todd F. Simon. 1993. *The Economics and Regulation of United States Newspapers*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

\*Meyer, Philip. 2002. *Precision Journalism: A Reporter's Introduction to Social Science Methods*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.

\*\*Riffe, Daniel, Charles Aust and Stephen Lacy. 1993. "The Effectiveness of Random, Consecutive Day and Constructed Week Sampling in Newspaper Content Analysis". *Journalism Quarterly* 70 (Spring): 133-39.

Weber, Robert P. 1990. *Basic Content Analysis*. 2nd Ed. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Young, Mary Lynn. *Crime Content and Media Economics: Gendered Practices and Sensational Stories, 1950-2000*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto.

**Appendix A  
Coding Sheet  
Cornwall Public Inquiry**

**1) Year**

**2) Genre**

1. News Story
2. Brief
3. Feature
4. Editorial
5. Column

**3) Origin**

1. Local
2. Regional
3. National
4. Specialized

**4) Number of sources – 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5**

**5) SOURCE**

- 1) Cornwall Police
- 2) OPP (Project Truth)
- 3) Alleged Victim/Family
- 4) Government Official
- 5) Social Agency  
occured
- 6) Expert
- 7) Catholic Church
- 8) Other media
- 9) Citizen's Group  
investigation
- 10) Perry Dunlop
- 11) Other Source
- 12) Alleged Perpetrator

**5) Facts Cited**

1. Pedophile Ring Exists
2. Suicide - Victim
3. Suicide – Perpetrator
- 4) Conspiracy Against Victims
- 5) Historical child sex abuse – uncertain/never
- 6) Cornwall Police – thorough investigation
- 7) Cornwall Police – NOT a thorough investigation
- 8) OPP/Project truth – thorough investigation
- 9) OPP/Project Truth – NOT a thorough
- 10) Judicial System – thorough job
- 11) Judicial System – NOT a competent job.

**6) Tone**

1) Positive

2) Negative

3) Neutral

# Scouts' honor



"Scouts' Honor" tells the story that the Boy Scouts did not want you to read: How the Grand Teton Council leaders ignored multiple warnings and hired a pedophile to help lead a summer camp.

This series relies on public documents that two of Idaho's most powerful law firms tried to bury -- more than 1,000 pages, including sworn statements that spell out how the molester depended on church, family and Scout connections to get away with abusing at least two dozen boys from Idaho to Alaska.

## Part 1

Sick of being preyed on, a 14-year-old Scout forced Scout leaders to call police.

## Part 2

At least one Grand Teton Council board officer knew Brad Stowell had a problem.

## Part 3

Experts disagree, widely, whether it was certain that Stowell would strike again.

## Part 4

After the molester was caught, what did Grand Teton Council leaders decide to change?

## Part 5

Where are the key Scout officials and other players today?

## Part 6

What should you do if you think you, your child or a friend was in harm's way?



**49° F**  
SSW 9 mph



Mostly Cloudy  
Weather data provided by  
weather.com®  
Idaho Falls, ID

[Home](#)

**Monday**  
**October 22, 2007**

[News](#)

- A Section
- Community
- Fitness & Fashion
- Nation / World
- Obituaries
- Opinion
- Sports
- The West
- Comics
- Post Talk

[Free Links](#)

-  The Daily Miracle
- PRChat
- Multimedia
- Classifieds
- Place an ad
- Public Notices
- Breaking News
- Obituary Requests
- Forgot Password
- Contact Us
- Newsroom Staff
- Newsroom Ethics
- On Bridge
- 

- Special Reports
- About Us

- Subscribe
- Subscriber Services
- Wallpaper

## Continuing Reports

**March 11, 2005**

### Secret Boy Scout case opened

Leaders: Telling parents about molester would 'open old wounds'

**April 6, 2005**

### Stowell faces probation hearing

Former Boy Scouts leader allegedly violated his probation for interacting with children and viewing pornography

**April 26, 2005**

### Stowell sentenced to prison

Man who admitted molesting boys gets 2 to 14 years for probation violation

**May 05, 2005**

### Scouts whistleblower honored

Police and sheriff's office recognize Adam Steed for his service to the community

**July 13, 2005**

### Scout case 'not found'

Court records show fourth pedophile led several Boy Scouts outings

**March 14, 2006**

### Abuse bill now law

As of Monday, Idaho no longer has a statute of limitations on child sex abuse

## A persistent problem

**July 03, 2005**

### MORE PEDOPHILE CASES EMERGE WITH SCOUT CAMP CONNECTIONS

### PEDOPHILES AT SCOUT CAMP

## Editorials

**March 6, 2005**

Datebook  
Community Forms  
TV Times  
IdahoHomeFinder  
Yellowstone and  
the Region  
Scenic89.com  
Advertising Info  
Help  
TV Listings

[-Privacy Policy-](#)

A true story of a Scout in action

Denying the obvious

**March 11, 2005**

A hypocrite plays his games

**March 13, 2005**

The judgment

**May 01, 2005**

Seven years later

**July 14, 2005**

And then there were four

## Contributors

**March 6, 2005**

A Boy Scout to the end -- Mary Beckman

**March 9, 2005**

Scouts Honor was a disservice -- Mary Haley

**March 10, 2005**

When warnings go unheeded -- Richard Scarborough

## Letters to the Editor

**March 2, 2005**

Stowell's a changed man -- Robbie Sleight

Subscription canceled -- Glen Briscoe

**March 6, 2005**

Real journalism -- Francie Johnson

A wolf in the coop -- Dave Forrest

Think about the victims -- Trimelds C. McDaniels

©Post Register



[Home](#)

[Part 2 >>](#)

# Scouts' honor



By PETER ZUCKERMAN • PZUCKERMAN@POSTREGISTER.COM • AND POST REGISTER STAFF

COPYRIGHT 2005 POST REGISTER

## The whistle-blower

His first week of Boy Scout camp, 14-year-old junior counselor Adam Steed marched into the director's office and said: "Brad Stowell is molesting Scouts."

Brad wouldn't do that, said the man behind the desk.

"How can it be right that Brad goes into boys' tents alone, gives them massages and touches them where he shouldn't?" the Pocatello teenager asked.

"We've talked to Brad," Elias Lopez said. "He promised me he doesn't massage below the waist."

Adam asked to go home.

Stay, Lopez said.

Adam asked to call his parents.

Don't tell them about Stowell, Lopez said.

Adam stomped out, frustrated. It wasn't the first time he had complained.

This is Adam Steed's account, told publicly for the first time.

The adults wouldn't stop Stowell, so Adam decided to do it himself. With help from his little brother, Ben, he gathered a group of victims who told their stories and demanded someone call the police.

About four days later, on July 11, 1997, many of the



Adam Steed



Ben Steed

roughly 300 children at camp gathered by the dining hall as deputies arrested Stowell and hauled him away.

Charged with sex abuse, Stowell eventually pleaded guilty to molesting two boys.

A district judge sentenced Stowell to 150 days -- the time often served by repeat drunk drivers -- and put him on probation for 15 years.

Then came the lawsuits. Victims other than the Steed boys alleged the Boy Scouts knew Stowell was a risk and hired him anyway.

The Scouts had the lawsuit files closed and settled the claims.

When one file was finally released to the public last month, it revealed that before the Scouts settled the suits and paid the victims, Stowell had testified under oath that from 1988 to 1997 he molested at least 24 boys, many of them Scout campers. Another victim was 6 years old. Scout leaders testified they received warnings but went ahead and hired Stowell.

Stowell is now 32, married and living on the 800 block of Chantilly Lane in Idaho Falls. He works at an eastern Idaho recreational vehicle dealership, hasn't reoffended and was recently accepted to law school. He said he's changed and that this publicity is unfair.

But Adam, now a junior studying science at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, said he has trouble understanding how Stowell molested so many kids and served so little time in jail.

Local Scout volunteers, he said, do great work and shouldn't be tarnished by the actions of a few.

The camp director, Elias Lopez, wasn't being malicious, Adam said; he was poorly trained and following orders.

The Scouting professionals at the Grand Teton Council (which oversees Scouting in the region) didn't do their jobs and allowed a pedophile to devastate the lives of dozens of children, Adam said.

Nearly eight years later, Adam still wants to know: Why did it take a 14-year-old to finally confront the molester?

Brad Stowell looked like someone parents trust: button-down shirts, trimmed hair and a ready smile.

He had served an LDS mission, he worked for the Boy Scouts as a teenager, his mother was on the Boy Scouts board of directors. He talked Scouting and religion. He brought his fiancée with him as he schmoozed neighbors, including the Steeds.

He ate dinner at the Steed home in Pocatello, gave Ben and Adam rides in his souped-up Toyota 4-by-4 and cheered at Adam's wrestling meets.

"He came with all the credentials and had the appearance of someone you want your children around," said Adam's father, Paul Steed, who teaches at the LDS church's Century Seminary in Pocatello.

Everyone in the neighborhood seemed to love Stowell, too, and Paul and Deborah Steed were flattered when he asked their sons to work with him at Camp Little Lemhi.

Stowell invited Adam to camp early. He said four other staffers would be sleeping in the same room and he needed Adam's help "to make sure camp was ready."

It was a lie.

Little, if any, work was done on the camp. Stowell opened a cabin on the east side of the lake, talked about the soft mattresses and placed two sleeping bags on the same bed, zippers facing each other. The bed was in a room away from the others.

Adam moved his sleeping bag to the floor.

Stowell put it back on the bed.

"I want to sleep alone," Adam said.

Scouts often sleep together, Stowell said.

Adam woke later that night to heavy breathing.

Someone had unzipped his bag and undone his clothes.

Stowell hovered overhead, naked. His hands were busy where they shouldn't be.

"What is going on?" Adam thought. He tried to move, but was petrified.

Stowell breathed faster and louder.

Adam sat up and acted like he'd just woken.

Stowell moved away.

Adam stayed awake most the night praying Stowell wouldn't return.

After the so-called work day, Adam went home, fearful of the man who used to look like a perfect Scout.

Adam didn't want to return to the camp.

Stowell told the Steeds their son couldn't break his commitment and that Camp Little Lemhi was understaffed.

Adam braced himself.

"You got one, too?" another counselor said when he saw Adam's necklace on the first day of camp. "I burned mine."

"Why?" Adam asked.

"Don't you know?"

Adam didn't.

Stowell slipped the leather necklace around Adam's neck six months before camp. He called it a "friendship necklace" and said he got it on his LDS mission.

Other boys had them, too. Stowell made them seem cool, something Scouts earned -- like a merit badge.

Adam pressed the boy. Why burn it? Because, Adam was told, Stowell gave necklaces to the boys he touched in the dark.

Adam boiled. He recruited his 12-year-old brother to spy on Stowell and hunt for other victims.

Necklace-wearers were easy to find but reluctant to talk. Children, especially teenage boys, often feel humiliated if they're molested. They may think they'll get in trouble if they tell anyone what's happened to them.

When victims did open up to Adam, they reported attacks like his own.

Scouts are taught to remember three R's to keep themselves safe from abuse: Recognize danger, Resist abusers and Report.

It was time to Report.

One problem. Such reports were supposed to go to the program director: Brad Stowell.

Adam went to the man in charge of the whole camp.

Gathering his courage, he found the camp director by the bell in the center of camp.

Adam felt like he'd pass out, but he spoke to Lopez in a clear voice: "I need to talk to you."

It took a long time, and Adam still didn't think Lopez believed him.

Don't worry, Lopez said when they were done.

Adam kept an eye on Stowell, and a few hours later, Lopez pulled Adam aside to talk again.

He had talked to his supervisor and to Stowell. Everything had been resolved, the man said.

But within two days, Stowell followed Adam to his tent at night, crept inside and tried to touch him.

Adam ran.

He dashed to the north side of the lake, where a white canvas tent stood near the dock. Panting, Adam sat amid the noisy crowd of campers.

Some time later, perhaps 20 minutes, Stowell walked in. He opened a Bible and sat next to one of the children to read Scriptures. In his right hand, Stowell held the Good Book. With his left hand, he massaged a child's shoulder. Ben and

Adam watched the hand move down the child's pants.

The child, one of the youngest in the room, didn't say anything. He looked shocked, a forced smile on his face.

Older staffers laughed at Stowell's jokes and listened to a story. Didn't they notice?

So Adam stood up. "Don't do that," he said in a voice everyone could hear.

Stowell ignored him.

Adam wedged his arms between Stowell and the boy and pried them apart.

Stowell kept talking.

From the beginning, Stowell had separated Ben and Adam from most of the other Scouts, putting the brothers alone in a tent on the north side of the lake. Most campers slept in larger groups in a different area.

Ben, a heavy sleeper, woke one night (as best he can recall, four nights later) and noticed he'd been moved outside. His sleeping bag was unzipped.

He dragged his sleeping gear inside, tied the tent closed, zipped his bag and fell asleep.

He woke again, perhaps an hour later. Again, someone had dragged him outside and unzipped his sleeping bag.

This time, he tied the tent closed with a fist-sized knot. He asked his brother, now awake, what was going on.

"Be careful," Adam said.

The third time Ben woke outside, Stowell's hand covered his mouth. Ben tried to yell but couldn't. He struggled free, and Stowell ran away.

Adam and Ben were furious: This kind of stuff shouldn't happen at Scout camp.

The next day, Adam, who wanted to be an Eagle Scout, stopped all work on merit badges. He spied on Stowell full time. He followed him when he went into tents alone, stopping him when he tried to touch kids.

By now, Adam was reporting each incident to Lopez, who didn't seem to believe him and kept telling Adam he was calling his supervisors.

When Adam gathered Scouts who were willing to walk with him into Lopez's office, he demanded the camp leader call the police.

Instead, Lopez wanted to call the Scouting office.

Adam shook his head. "This is a police matter."

Everything is OK, the man said. Brad won't go alone into tents anymore.

Adam asked for a phone.



44° F

NNW 4 mph



Partly Cloudy

weather.com

Weather data provided by weather.com®

Idaho Falls, ID

[Home](#)

**Tuesday**  
**October 23, 2007**

[News](#)

- A Section
- Community
- Nation / World
- Obituaries
- Opinion
- Sports
- The Moose
- The West
- Comics
- Post Talk

[Free Links](#)



- The Daily Miracle
- PRChat
- Multimedia
- Classifieds
- Place an ad
- Public Notices
- Breaking News
- Obituary Requests
- Forgot Password
- Contact Us
- Newsroom Staff
- Newsroom Ethics
- On Bridge



Special Reports

About Us

Subscribe

Subscriber Services

Wallpaper

Datebook

Community Forms

TV Times

IdahoHomeFinder

Yellowstone and  
the Region

Scenic89.com

Advertising Info

Help

TV Listings

[Privacy Policy](#)

The Scouts are taught to "always be prepared," but Adam wasn't ready for the backlash.

Nobody believed him.

The molester said he'd been framed for accidentally brushing a child's rear on an obstacle course. Plenty of folks believed that.

Classmates gossiped that it was Adam's fault. That's what he got for spending so much time with Stowell.

After Stowell was arrested, Paul Steed, a loyal worker in the LDS church's Scouting program, had to press his sons for their story. They resisted for a half-hour.

"They said they weren't allowed to say what happened," he said.

Adam's classmates, who didn't read the court file, harassed him.

The Scouts never defended the whistle-blower's honor either, the Steeds say.

And the news media weren't helpful, publishing few details.

"Many of the parents don't know what happened to their children," Paul Steed said. The Scouts and the courts didn't tell parents, he said, even when they should have suspected there were more victims.

For at least four years, Scout leaders had access to a sworn statement from Brad Stowell in which he said he began abusing boys at camp in 1988 and victimized two dozen boys, many of them campers.

Based on what a prosecutor once told them, the Steeds thought Stowell would get a standard sentence for a serial molester: about 20 years in prison.

When the time came for court, hardly any victims would testify, the Steeds said. Parents, who didn't know what happened, loved Stowell. Youngsters didn't want to criticize the Boy Scouts. Adam was on his own.

The rumors and harassment were so bad at his high school that he left, took the GED to graduate and took college courses.

"I felt like I was the one who got in trouble," he said.

Still, Adam said he knew he did the right thing. When he feels upset, he can look at the letter the courts ordered Stowell to write him:

"I'm sure I would have continued going to camp had I not been caught. ... I was always creating a circle of more lies, more deception and more opportunities to abuse boys for my gratification. That was my ultimate goal with the boys I befriended."

If he had not exposed Stowell, Adam said, he could have enjoyed high school.

The Boy Scouts might have treated him better.

They might have recruited him to help lead campers.

Instead, he did what Scouts are supposed to do: help other people ... stay morally straight ... do a good turn daily.

Today, Brad Stowell is an Eagle Scout with five palms.

Adam Steed is not.

**Idaho Falls reporter Peter Zuckerman can be reached at 542-6750.**

---

## Scout leaders' defense

Boy Scout leaders say they stopped the molester at Camp Little Lemhi as fast as they could, but not as fast as they'd have liked.

Brad Stowell was slick, the camp leaders facing a negligence lawsuit say.

He used church, Scout and family connections to prey on boys. He lied to leaders, promising he wouldn't go into cabins alone. He pretended not to know leaders are never to be alone with Scouts.

"Abusers are good deceivers," said Kim Hansen, executive director of the Grand Teton Council, and even one molestation case is too many.

Stowell's victims agree with the Scouts on that much. Brad Stowell had all the credentials of someone people trust: an Eagle award, excellent school grades, his church's approval to serve as a missionary.

But no matter how good the Boy Scouts' child protection policy is -- and experts agree it's one of the best -- a determined pedophile can slip into the ranks of 30,000 volunteers and Scouts who belong to the Grand Teton Council.

In the seven camp seasons since Stowell's arrest, there haven't been any other known pedophiles, Hansen said. He has been with the Grand Teton Council since 1993 and said Stowell is the only case of which he knows.

Hansen said that while he is sorry for the victims, he is confident the Scouts have done what they could to help, calling two of the families and providing one with counseling.

Pressed for the number of victims, he said, "I personally talked to two parents." The third parent was an employee of the camp and knew what was going on, he said.

Hansen said the Grand Teton Council's review of what happened shows adult leaders followed Scout policies and quickly got rid of the molester.

The man who was in charge of Camp Little Lemhi on the day of Stowell's arrest won't discuss how the complaints against Stowell were handled. Former camp director Elias Lopez referred questions to Scout lawyers, who have refused several requests for interviews. (They have even refused to identify themselves when they appear at Scout court hearings.)

Although Lopez won't answer questions, recently unsealed files of a civil lawsuit against the Scouts include his sworn testimony.

Under oath, Lopez said his only problem with Stowell before the arrest concerned giving a minor a ride home when there was no other adult with him.

That's against Scout rules, and Stowell acted like it was an oversight, Lopez said.

That's the only time he ever heard about Stowell being alone with a child, Lopez said.

"At that time, I felt very comfortable with (Stowell's) leadership and that he had obeyed the rules."

Lopez said he talked to Adam Steed, the whistle-blower, because two 16-year-old counselors told him to do it. Lopez said Adam, who seemed scared, approached him alone.

Although Adam and his brother say they reported abuse to Lopez several times, Lopez said the only conversation he had with them was on 9:30 a.m. the day before Stowell's arrest.

Adam told him Stowell had touched him inappropriately. Lopez was shocked but believed the boy, he said.

In sworn testimony, Lopez said Stowell told him about his habit of giving boys backrubs and massages but assured him he did nothing inappropriate.

Lopez testified he was never given any information about Stowell's history of abuse. After the Steeds' report, he said, he called Hansen, the executive director, who told him "unless there was skin-to-skin contact ... we wouldn't be able to do much legally except keep a close eye on Brad."

According to Lopez, Hansen contacted the authorities and Lopez interviewed Stowell, who was feeling sick and denied the allegations. Lopez waited for the authorities to arrive while he kept an eye on Adam.

After the arrest, the Grand Teton Council conducted no formal post-mortem discussion of what happened, Lopez testified. Asked whether Hansen came up with any new rules, guidelines or practices, Lopez said no.

Scout leaders followed their policies, Hansen said, and acted swiftly. Changes were not needed.

Hansen said the Grand Teton Council's review of what happened shows adult leaders followed Scout policies and quickly got rid of the molester.

Under oath, Lopez said his only problem with Stowell before the arrest concerned giving a minor a ride home when there was no other adult with him.

Asked whether Hansen came up with any new rules, guidelines or practices, Lopez said no.

---

## **Multiple Warnings**

**1988-2005**

**By Jerry Painter / Post Register**

1988 Brad Stowell, 16, admits to Blackfoot police, his mother and his LDS bishop that he molested a 6-year-old neighbor. He is sent to LDS Social Services counseling.

1988 Stowell is hired to teach first aid at Camp Little Lemhi. He has testified he started preying on campers that summer.

1989 Brad Stowell is hired as a waterfront instructor at Camp Little Lemhi.

1990 Brad Stowell is rehired at Camp Little Lemhi.

1991 Camp director Richard Snow hires Stowell as assistant aquatics director.

1991 Richard J. Scarborough reports to the national Boy Scouts of America that a child molester has been hired to work at Camp Little Lemhi.



1992/93 The LDS church sends Stowell on a mission to Alaska, where, he now admits, he molested at least one child.

1993 Judith Stowell, mother of Brad Stowell, joins Grand Teton Council Executive Board after 14 years as a Cub Scout leader.

January 1994 Richard Scarborough writes to the LDS church president, complaining that local church leaders are ignoring his warning about the pedophile in the LDS Scout troop.

January 1995 Carol Scarborough tells Camp Little Lemhi program director Jim Summers that Brad Stowell molested a neighbor boy.

1995 Camp Little Lemhi director Richard Snow hires Stowell as aquatics director.

1995 Office of Elder Vaughan Featherstone of the LDS church First Quorum of the Seventy forwards a tip about Stowell to the Boy Scouts of America's official church liaison, C. Hart Bullock. Bullock orders the Grand Teton Council to check it out.



June 1995 Grand Teton Council executive Brad Allen calls Stowell's bishop, who confirms Stowell was sent to counseling after the 1988 incident. When asked, Stowell tells Allen there was an "incident" but says he is over it.

1996 Camp Little Lemhi director Robert Fawcett promotes Stowell to camp program director.

June 1996 Fawcett admonishes Stowell to stop breaking Scout rules against being alone with campers and touching them too much.



1997 Little Lemhi director Elias Lopez rehires Stowell as program director.

June 1997 Lopez admonishes Stowell to stop breaking Scout rules against being alone with campers.

July 11, 1997 Stowell is arrested at Camp Little Lemhi for child sex abuse.

Dec. 3, 1997 Stowell is sentenced to five months in jail, plus 15 years probation.

January 2001 A court refuses victim's request to open files in the negligence case against the Boy Scouts.

2001, 2004 Negligence cases are settled.

2005 Court records in one of the negligence cases are opened.

**Sources: Sworn testimony and exhibits from Bonneville County civil case CV-99-3416**



Stowell

[Home](#)

[Part 2 >>](#)

©Post Register



<<Part 1

Part 3 >>

# Scouts' honor



By DEAN MILLER • DMILLER@POSTREGISTER.COM • AND POST REGISTER STAFF

COPYRIGHT 2005 POST REGISTER

## Missed opportunities

### Leaders of Scouts, church had multiple chances to stop abuser

#### Chance 1: Mother and bishop, 1988

Paid professionals at the Grand Teton Council hired a child molester to work at Camp Little Lemhi even though they, the national Boy Scout office and troop sponsors in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were warned about Brad Stowell.

Court records, which the Boy Scouts' lawyers fought to hide from public view, show the warnings might have been sufficient to disqualify Stowell from Scouting six years before he was finally arrested.

But Stowell might never have had the chance to prey on Scout campers if his mother, who knew he had a problem, had steered him away from youth programs.



B. Stowell

Stowell's mother, the family's LDS bishop and at least one Blackfoot police officer knew as early as 1988 that he had molested a child.

Police found out, pulled 16-year-old Stowell out of class and interrogated him at the police station. He confessed -- to his mother, Judith Stowell, and later to his LDS bishop -- that he had molested a 6-year-old neighbor boy. No charges were filed, but Judith Stowell and her husband had to drive him from Blackfoot to Pocatello for counseling for about six months, she said in her sworn testimony on the case.

Both Judith Stowell and Bishop Lorin Talbot were in a position to steer the pedophile away from Camp Little Lemhi and into some other activity that didn't involve children.

A warning from Talbot would have carried considerable clout with the Scouts.



Since 1913, Boy Scouting has been the LDS church's official program for young men, which is why almost every troop in eastern Idaho is LDS-church sponsored.

"I've really got nothing to say," Talbot said in a Saturday phone interview. "He went through the counseling, and they figured he was OK."

Judith Stowell had considerable pull with the Grand Teton Council, too. A Cub Scout leader since 1979, she was on the board of directors of the Grand Teton Council by the time Brad Stowell was a teenager.

Hansen Efforts to reach Judith Stowell at her Pocatello phone number for comment were unsuccessful.

In summer 1988, she allowed her son to take a job teaching first aid at Camp Little Lemhi. Grand Teton Council troops from Idaho, Wyoming and Montana brought about 300 boys per week to learn outdoor skills.

Brad Stowell molested his first Scout camp victim that summer.

He has testified that he continued to prey on boys right up until he was arrested nine years later. He admitted under sworn court testimony to molesting 24 boys.

Toward the end of his camp career, Brad Stowell has said in court-ordered apologies to his victims, he felt invincible. Although admonished not to, he showered attention on a few boys, giving them gifts and back rubs. The back rubs progressed to massages that ended with him fondling boys' private parts while Stowell pleased himself. Wrestling and piggyback rides were chances for more groping. In the dark, he snuck into tents and forced sex acts on sleeping boys. On weekends, he flouted the rule against leaders being alone with boys by giving them rides home, which also led to molestations off camp premises.

When Brad Stowell was arrested in 1997, Judith Stowell was on the Grand Teton Council executive committee. Today, she is listed as a Hall of Fame honoree on the Grand Teton Council's Web site.

## **Chance 2: Boy Scouts headquarters, 1991**

In May 1991, a Blackfoot man named Richard Scarborough wrote to the national Boy Scout office in Irving, Texas, complaining that his reports about a child molester named Brad Stowell were being ignored by eastern Idaho Scout leaders and the troop's sponsors in the LDS church.

Called as a witness in a victim's lawsuit against the Scouts, Scarborough said he knew about Stowell because a church bishop had told him Stowell abused a neighbor. The bishop was inquiring about the safety of Scarborough's sons, who were in Scouts with Stowell.

Court files recently unsealed do not make it clear what the national staff of the Boy Scouts did about Scarborough's report, and Post Register efforts to further interview Scarborough have been unsuccessful.

But the Scouts maintain an "Ineligible Volunteer" file that it uses to weed out boys and adults who don't fit the organization's high moral standards.

### Chance 3: Cleared for LDS mission, 1993

Stowell did not work for the Grand Teton Council the summers of 1992, 1993 and 1994 while he attended Idaho State University and served an LDS mission in Anchorage, Alaska.

Queries sent to the LDS church public affairs office in Salt Lake City regarding Stowell's worthiness for missionary service have not yet been answered.

But returned missionaries and former mission presidents have told the Post Register that Stowell should never have been cleared to serve once he confessed to his bishop that he molested a boy.

Parents and Scout leaders have said his status as a returned missionary led them to trust Stowell.

In a phone interview Saturday, Lorin Talbot, the Blackfoot bishop who heard Stowell's confession in 1988, said he trusted experts who said Stowell was cured. He couldn't recall the LDS Social Services counselor's name, but Talbot said he was told it was a one-time incident. By the time Stowell was called to the mission field, Talbot had been released from his bishop's duties.

While serving in the Alaska Anchorage Mission, Stowell committed sex abuse at least once, he has confessed under oath.

Talbot said Saturday was the first time he heard that.

There is no indication in the court file that the Boy Scouts or its lawyers alerted Alaska officials to seek out that victim or victims after Stowell told them in 1999.

Under Idaho law, religious counselors such as priests, pastors or LDS bishops are not required to report suspected child abuse the way the Scout leaders, school teachers and other youth workers are.

### Chance 4: LDS leaders misinformed, 1994

Frustrated by the failure of local Scout and church officials to oust Brad Stowell, Richard Scarborough finally wrote in January 1994 to his faith's prophet, seer and revelator: LDS church President Ezra Taft Benson.

"There is an individual (Bradley Stowell) who was sent on a mission ... This individual sexually molested a six-year-old boy," Scarborough wrote.

Armed with the knowledge of Stowell's 1988 offense, the worldwide leadership of the church could have either ordered him to quit Scouting or ordered its Scout troops to put him on the ineligible volunteer list.

But three members of the Northwest Area Presidency of the LDS church signed a letter to Scarborough in April 1994, saying the allegation was reported to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, an investigation was made, and "it was determined the nature of the allegations warranted no further action."

It's unclear how church officials obtained the information because Idaho law prohibits Health and Welfare from releasing such details to private individuals or organizations, particularly in a case involving a juvenile.

In addition, the church leaders' account contradicts what the Grand Teton Council's lawyer divulged in 2001 at the end of the first lawsuit against the



44° F

NNW 4 mph



Partly Cloudy

weather.com

Weather data provided by weather.com®

Idaho Falls, ID

—Home—

**Tuesday**  
**October 23, 2007**

—News—

- A Section
- Community
- Nation / World
- Obituaries
- Opinion
- Sports
- The Moose
- The West

Comics  
Post Talk



The Daily Miracle  
PRChat  
Multimedia  
Classifieds  
Place an ad  
Public Notices  
Breaking News  
Obituary Requests  
Forgot Password  
Contact Us  
Newsroom Staff  
Newsroom Ethics  
On Bridge



Special Reports  
About Us

Subscribe  
Subscriber Services  
Wallpaper  
Datebook  
Community Forms  
TV Times  
IdahoHomeFinder  
Yellowstone and  
the Region  
Scenic89.com  
Advertising Info  
Help  
TV Listings



Scouts.

The 1988 case was "seriously investigated" by Blackfoot police and the Health and Welfare, attorney Gary Dance said. After consultation with Stowell's bishop, "a remedy was fashioned," Dance told the Post Register. Stowell received six months of counseling and wrote a letter of apology to the family, Dance said.

Black's Law Dictionary defines a remedy as "the means by which a right is enforced or the violation of a right is prevented, redressed or compensated."

**Chance 5: Camp Little Lemhi staff, 1995**

The Scouts missed another chance to stop Stowell in 1995, when Jim Summers, the camp's program director, was told Stowell was a pedophile.

Efforts to interview Summers were unsuccessful, but his sworn deposition is found in the recently unsealed files of a civil lawsuit filed by one of Stowell's victims.

"Brad had recently returned from an LDS mission. I called and asked him if he wanted to come interview," Summers testified in 1999.

Summers said he wanted him to run the waterfront even though a teacher at Stalker Elementary School in Blackfoot warned him Stowell had abused a 6-year-old neighbor.

The teacher says she sought Summers out to challenge Stowell's worthiness for a camp job and was rebuffed.

"He (Summers) asked me if there was any police record, and I said I didn't know," Carol Scarborough testified in the lawsuit. "He said, 'Well, if there isn't, I have to hire him.' " That's probably not true.

Because it's a private organization in an "at-will employment" state (where employers can fire workers without cause), the Scouts didn't have to hire anyone it didn't want to.

If Scarborough's warning worried them, Summers and camp director Richard Snow could have picked a different waterfront director without a questionable background.

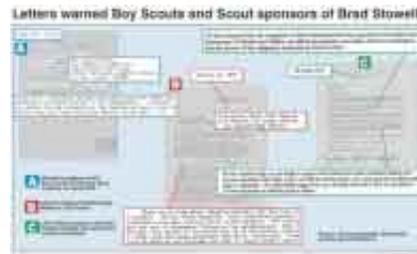
But even though Snow told him he had heard the same thing, Summers testified, they hired Stowell anyway.

Even if Summers had decided to follow up on Carol Scarborough's warning, he might have hit a stone wall.

Asked two weeks ago to look up the 1988 case, Blackfoot Police Chief Dave Moore said there is no file on Stowell. James Jackson, who was a detective and then police chief at about that time, says he doesn't remember the case, but the department's triple cross-reference system for paper records should have turned up the detectives' notes and Stowell's written statement.

**Chance 6: Grand Teton Council, 1995**

In 1995, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of the LDS church, who



also served on the Boy Scouts of America national board, asked the Grand Teton Council to investigate Brad Stowell.

The tip was first turned over to C. Hart Bullock, the Boy Scouts of America's representative for the entire northwestern United States.

Headquartered in Salt Lake City, Bullock was also the Boy Scouts of America's official liaison to the LDS church.

Bullock, testifying in the victim's lawsuit, kept notes of the call from the office of Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone, who at one time had international responsibilities in the LDS church organization.

"Brad Stoll lives 210 Jefferson St. Blackfoot, Id," Bullock's note of the call reads. "Has fondled and sodomized a 6 yr old boy. Brad is working on waterfront at Little Lemhi Camp."

Bullock said he called Grand Teton Council executive director Brad Allen and asked him to check it out.

Allen called back within a couple of days, Bullock testified.

"He stated that he had checked with the boy's current LDS bishop, his past bishop, and that they had told him there was absolutely no indication that this young man was involved in any type of activity he was accused of ... this was an outstanding young man. And they could give him no reason that this boy could not be affiliated with Scouting."

Sometime before camp started in 1995, Allen also went to Stowell with the allegation.

"I said the incident had occurred," Stowell testified he told Allen.

" ... and he said, "How have you been since then?" And he kept asking me questions about if I had ever done that again and if I was still doing that and I told him, 'No.' "

Boy Scout membership is premised on high moral standards, and leaders are taught to drum out anyone who cannot uphold them.

Stowell was allowed to work at camp for another two years after Allen's investigation.

### **Chance 7: A boy pushes men to act**

Just days after camp started in 1997, it was campers, sick of being preyed upon, who finally forced the camp staff to call police.

Adam Steed, a 14-year-old Stowell had befriended in order to molest, discovered other boys had been fondled and molested by Stowell. He gathered their stories and reported them to the camp director until Bonneville County Sheriff's deputies were summoned.

Detectives arrested Stowell in uniform at Camp Little Lemhi in view of the campers. Charged with molesting children, he pleaded guilty to two counts. He served five months in jail and was placed on probation for 15 years.

Grand Teton Council executive director Kim Hansen says paid Scout staff and

volunteers took swift action in the Stowell case and that any claim they turned a blind eye is untrue.

**Post Register Managing Editor Dean Miller can be reached at 542-6766.**

---

## By the book

Excerpts from Boy Scout manuals for leaders:

"Membership in the Boy Scouts of America is a privilege ... BSA reserves the right to refuse registration whenever there is a concern that the individual may not meet the high standards of membership ..."

"Child molesters are members of all economic, educational, and occupational strata of society, and are from all religious denominations. Do not ignore anyone because he or she is not the type."

---

## Rebuttal

Before the "Scouts' honor" series was printed, Grand Teton Council director Kim Hansen issued a response. It says, in part:

"The claim that the Council turned a 'blind eye' to Mr. Stowell's child abuse is simply not true. The Council took swift action to remove Mr. Stowell. The current council leadership promptly reported the abuse to the Bonneville County Sheriff's Office, after a youth staff member, who had participated in Scouting's Youth Protection training, reported his concern to the camp director."

The full text of the council's statement is contained in an ad scheduled to run in Tuesday's Post Register.

---

## Now the story can be told

Eastern Idahoans knew in 1997 that Brad Stowell had been arrested at Camp Little Lemhi and had pleaded guilty to molesting Boy Scouts there.

What they don't know is what professional Scout leaders knew in the years leading up to that verdict and to the Boy Scouts' decision to pay two victims who sued for negligence.

That's because two of Idaho's most powerful law firms succeeded in having the files sealed.

The negligence lawsuits didn't appear in the courthouse public access computer until the Post Register noted in print that the ISTAR system was reporting the cases didn't exist, a situation legal experts have called highly unusual.

Court officials say one case disappeared from public view because of a computer glitch that has since been fixed. That case, including Stowell's admission that he molested 24 children, has since been unsealed.

The Boy Scouts are still fighting to keep the other case closed to "protect the names of the innocent victims," said Kim Hansen, Grand Teton Council executive director. But the Post Register, by longstanding policy, does not print the names of the sex-crime victims without their consent. Nor do any other reputable media outlets.

Judge W.H. Woodland, who signed the secret order that removed all references to that second case from the courthouse's public record, announced Thursday that he will soon rule on the Post Register's request to open the case.

[<<Part 1](#)

[Part 3 >>](#)

©Post Register



<<Part 2

Part 4 >>

# Scouts' honor



By PETER ZUCKERMAN • PZUCKERMAN@POSTREGISTER.COM • AND POST REGISTER STAFF

COPYRIGHT 2005 POST REGISTER

## Ask the experts

### No consensus on the risks of hiring a known child molester

Experts disagree on the risk Brad Stowell posed when the Boy Scouts hired the confessed molester to work as the waterfront director at Camp Little Lemhi near Swan Valley.

Some say the Scouts practically guaranteed children would get hurt when they hired Brad Stowell to work at the Swan Valley camp.

Others say the Scouts needn't have worried.

It all depends on whom you ask. Experts cite different statistics and studies to back their positions, and few can even agree on a definition of a pedophile or what molestation is.

On one side are those like Polly Franks, board member for the National Coalition of Victims in Action.

To her, hiring Stowell was like throwing a rattlesnake in a baby's crib.

"The baby might not get bitten, but who in their right mind would do it?" she said.

After all, Stowell had confessed to a 1988 incident with a 6-year-old boy to his mom, his Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints bishop and at least one Scout official.

Franks and others, many of them professors, cite statistics showing that among criminals, pedophiles are most likely to strike more than once and can't be cured

#### Conflicting statistics

- 3.5 percent of child molesters were re-arrested for a new sex crime within three years of release. That's a lower arrest rate than for rapists or drug addicts.
- 40 percent of child molesters will be arrested for a new crime within three years of release.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice

of their compulsion.

On the other side are experts like Richard Moran, a professor of sociology and criminology at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts.

He and others said the Scouts, even those who knew about Stowell's past, possibly made a good decision to hire him because pedophiles, like other criminals, deserve a second chance.

The courts considered Stowell safe, so the Scouts had every reason to think he was, too, these experts said. The judge -- who has access to more information than the public does -- was in a position to know what's best, and he wouldn't have let Stowell out of prison if the molester was going to strike again, they said.

Moran cited different statistics, which show pedophiles have one of the lowest re-offense rates and usually do change.

"The mass hysteria and media hype aren't true," Moran said.

A lot of the confusion stems from conflicting definitions.

Experts disagree on what a pedophile is and what constitutes an offense.

#### On the Net

Find out if a sex offender lives near you. Search by ZIP code, county or by name and date of birth on the Idaho sex-offender registry Web site:

- [www.isp.state.id.us/so\\_viewer/search.jsp](http://www.isp.state.id.us/so_viewer/search.jsp)

Is a person who preys on teens worse than one who preys on kindergartners? What's the difference between touching a child and making a child do the touching?

The data collected often comes from what pedophiles report, and it's hard to tell how reliable a source an offender is because pedophiles specialize in deception and manipulation.

Some experts say pedophilia is an addiction. Others theorize it is a sexual orientation distinct from straight, gay and bisexual.

The experts interviewed for this article who treat pedophiles usually said the offenders can change; those who prosecute them said they can't; those who do both say a simple answer is hard to support.

Experts say Stowell's risk of re-offending depends on the type of molester he might be.

Serial molesters, who are attracted to children and seek them out, can't help themselves and often think what they're doing is OK. Serial molesters either will try to do it again, have to resist a powerful urge, can't be changed, or will take longer to grow out of it, depending on whom you ask.

Situational pedophiles typically strike when they're intoxicated and have the opportunity. They probably won't strike again after treatment, said Keith Durkin, a criminology and sociology professor at Ohio Northern University.

He said these criminals are different from the more predatory serial molesters.

"If someone confesses to molesting 24 kids, you should multiply by three" to get the real number of victims,



Weather data provided by  
weather.com®

Idaho Falls, ID

[Home](#)

**Tuesday  
October 23, 2007**

[News](#)

- A Section
- Community
- Nation / World
- Obituaries
- Opinion
- Sports
- The Moose
- The West
- Comics
- Post Talk

[Free Links](#)



- The Daily Miracle
- PRChat
- Multimedia
- Classifieds
- Place an ad
- Public Notices
- Breaking News
- Obituary Requests
- Forgot Password
- Contact Us
- Newsroom Staff
- Newsroom Ethics
- On Bridge



- Special Reports
- About Us

- Subscribe
- Subscriber Services
- Wallpaper
- Datebook
- Community Forms
- TV Times
- IdahoHomeFinder

Durkin said.

His estimate reflects the findings of a study several authorities pointed to. It showed that once caught and convicted, the average pedophile confessed to having more than 100 victims. Efforts to get a copy and determine the veracity of this study were unsuccessful.

Experts said they couldn't tell what kind of molester Stowell was without talking to him and researching his background. Stowell molested dozens of kids, some several times. But he says the past eight years of treatment and the scrutiny of his probation officers have changed him.

The Post Register's decision to spotlight his case is unfair, he said.

"I was a molester," he said. "I'm not anymore."

He can't undo the past or make up to the children he hurt, but he's doing his best, he said. He has graduated from college, is married and lives in Idaho Falls, where his address is public record on the state's sex offender Web site.

He hasn't re-offended, and the terms of his probation, he said, are tough. He can't legally touch people younger than 21 or be in the same room as a minor without supervision, and he has to take a polygraph test every six months.

He's been open with family and neighbors about his past, according to a 1998 sentencing memorandum, and he acknowledges he's needed help. Long-term incarceration, the memorandum argues, wouldn't help him get better.

As waterfront director at Camp Little Lemhi, Stowell spent lots of time supervising children learning to swim. After several promotions, he was the leader of junior counselors, most in their early teens. As a longtime staffer, he had the run of the camp and used it to enter boys' cabins and tents at night, where he molested several boys.

When he was caught the first time, Stowell was sent to the LDS Church Social Services counseling center in Pocatello for six months. Carl White, who worked there at the time and is now the manager of the center, said he cannot discuss Stowell's case.

But he said the treatment of sex offenders is highly specialized and that if the courts sent someone like Stowell to Social Services today, he would be evaluated and then referred to an agency that does that work.

Back in 1988, the treatment Stowell got didn't work.

He continued to sexually assault young boys long after that counseling was done, including at least one while he was serving his LDS mission in Anchorage, Alaska.

When Stowell applied to law school after his conviction, he said he was molested as a 12-year-old, and "what I had been through planted some very unhealthy thoughts and desires in my mind." In a statement of his criminal history on the law school application, Stowell says he inappropriately "touched two staff members who were boys under the age of 16."

A judge denied Stowell's motion to end probation early so he could go to law school at Santa Clara University in California.



Durkin

Yellowstone and  
the Region  
Scenic89.com  
Advertising Info  
Help  
TV Listings

[Privacy Policy](#)

Several advocates encouraged parents to find out whether any sex offenders live near them and said all claims of pedophilia should be investigated. Others said parents shouldn't worry. Everyone agrees most sex abuse victims never tell anyone and people should report abuse to police even if it happened a decade ago.

The Boy Scouts seem to acknowledge this in their manual "Procedures for Maintaining Standards for Membership":

"Any allegation (of child abuse) that appears to have substance, even if anonymous, necessitates the immediate removal of the abuser from Scouting."

**Idaho Falls reporter Peter Zuckerman can be reached at 542-6750.**

## MULTIPLE WARNINGS

### 1988 -- 2005

1988 Brad Stowell, 16, admits to Blackfoot police, his mother and his LDS bishop that he molested a 6-year-old neighbor. He is sent to LDS Social Services counseling.

1988 Stowell is hired to teach first aid at Camp Little Lemhi. He has testified he started preying on campers that summer.

1989 Brad Stowell is hired as a waterfront instructor at Camp Little Lemhi.

1990 Brad Stowell is rehired at Camp Little Lemhi.

1991 Camp director Richard Snow hires Stowell as assistant aquatics director.

1991 Richard J. Scarborough reports to the national Boy Scouts of America that a child molester has been hired to work at Camp Little Lemhi.



1992/93 The LDS church sends Stowell on a mission to Alaska, where, he now admits, he molested at least one child.

1993 Judith Stowell, mother of Brad Stowell, joins Grand Teton Council Executive Board after 14 years as a Cub Scout leader.

January 1994 Richard Scarborough writes to the LDS church president, complaining that local church leaders are ignoring his warning about the pedophile in the LDS Scout troop.

January 1995 Carol Scarborough tells Camp Little Lemhi program director Jim Summers that Brad Stowell molested a neighbor boy.

1995 Camp Little Lemhi director Richard Snow hires Stowell as aquatics director.

1995 Office of Elder Vaughan Featherstone of the LDS church First Quorum of the Seventy forwards a tip about Stowell to the Boy Scouts of America's official church liaison, C. Hart Bullock. Bullock orders the Grand Teton Council to check it out.



June 1995 Grand Teton Council executive Brad Allen calls Stowell's bishop, who confirms Stowell was sent to counseling after the 1988 incident. When asked, Stowell tells Allen there was an "incident" but says he is over it.



1996 Camp Little Lemhi director Robert Fawcett promotes Stowell to camp program director.

June 1996 Fawcett admonishes Stowell to stop breaking Scout rules against being alone with campers and touching them too much.

1997 Little Lemhi director Elias Lopez rehires Stowell as program director.

June 1997 Lopez admonishes Stowell to stop breaking Scout rules against being alone with campers.

July 11, 1997 Stowell is arrested at Camp Little Lemhi for child sex abuse.

Dec. 3, 1997 Stowell is sentenced to five months in jail, plus 15 years probation.

January 2001 A court refuses victim's request to open files in the negligence case against the Boy Scouts.

2001, 2004 Negligence cases are settled.

2005 Court records in one of the negligence cases are opened.

**Sources: Sworn testimony and exhibits from Bonneville County civil case CV-99-3416**



Stowell

[<<Part 2](#)

[Part 4 >>](#)



<<Part 3

Part 5 >>

# Scouts' honor



By PETER ZUCKERMAN • PZUCKERMAN@POSTREGISTER.COM • AND POST REGISTER STAFF

COPYRIGHT 2005 POST REGISTER

## After further review ...

### Boy Scouts say no changes needed in molestation policy

The Boy Scouts haven't made many changes after the arrest of a camp leader who confessed to molesting children.

That's because they aren't needed, said Kim Hansen, executive director of the Grand Teton Council, which oversees Scouting in the region. The policies are good and Scout leaders obeyed them, he said.

"I don't think we're responsible for Mr. (Brad) Stowell's actions," he said, referring to the convicted pedophile who has confessed to molesting two dozen children, one of whom was 6 years old.

Wrong, said Laurie Gaffney, the attorney for the two victims who successfully sued the Scouts. She agrees the Scouts have a good child-protection program but said "policies are useless if you don't follow them."

When the Scouts hired Stowell, at least one of the organization's board members -- Stowell's mother, Judith -- knew that as a teenager, Stowell had been sent to counseling for abusing a child.

Letters reporting abuse were mailed to Scout leaders at least six years before Stowell's arrest. And one of the victims said in a sworn statement he never received any training from the Scouts about sex abuse, as policy requires.

It's unclear what kind of review Scout leaders did



Hansen



44° F

NNW 4 mph



Partly Cloudy  
Weather data provided by  
weather.com®

Idaho Falls, ID

Home

Tuesday  
October 23, 2007

News

- A Section
- Community
- Nation / World
- Obituaries
- Opinion
- Sports
- The Moose
- The West
- Comics
- Post Talk

Free Links



- The Daily Miracle
- PRChat
- Multimedia
- Classifieds

- Place an ad
- Public Notices
- Breaking News
- Obituary Requests
- Forgot Password
- Contact Us
- Newsroom Staff
- Newsroom Ethics
- On Bridge



- Special Reports
- About Us

- Subscribe
- Subscriber Services
- Wallpaper
- Datebook
- Community Forms
- TV Times
- IdahoHomeFinder
- Yellowstone and the Region
- Scenic89.com
- Advertising Info
- Help
- TV Listings



A source involved in the investigations of Brad Stowell's molestation of Boy Scout campers forwarded this letter to the Post Register. Although the letter says the Post Register's reporting is untrue, the letter was mailed two days before any part of the "Scouts' honor" series was published through.

And although Hansen said no changes were made as a result of the Stowell case, the Scouts have tightened up some controls on who gets to wear the leaders' uniform.

Two years ago, the organization began doing criminal background checks on adult leaders, and it does the checks again every time the leaders move to a new position. The Boy Scouts have expanded their abuse-education program so staffers can do more training on the Internet.

Here in eastern Idaho, the sleeping areas at Camp Little Lemhi have been moved to a more visible area, and the showers have been changed.

"Your children are never completely safe," Hansen said, "but we have one of the best protection programs around."



B. Stowell

**Post Register courts and crime reporter Peter Zuckerman can be reached at 542-6750.**

[<<Part 3](#)

[Part 5 >>](#)

after Stowell's arrest.

There wasn't one, Camp Director Elias Lopez said in a sworn statement taken three years after the arrest.

But Hansen said Scout leaders review camp problems every year, and that after Brad Stowell was arrested and pleaded guilty, they concluded they acted just as they should, immediately reporting the molestation allegations to police.

Hansen said the Scouts knew about three of the victims and contacted two. The other parent was at camp during the arrest.

Scout regulations require the district executive, Hansen, to contact the parents any time a boy is abused.

Since his sentencing, Stowell has confessed to molesting 24 children.

Experts agree the Boy Scouts of America have designed a good child-protection program, and that even the best programs allow some predators to slip through.



<<Part 4

Part 6 >>

# Scouts' honor



By DEAN MILLER • By PETER ZUCKERMAN • AND POST REGISTER STAFF

COPYRIGHT 2005 POST REGISTER

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW

| THEN   | THIER ROLE  | NOW   |
|--|---|---|
| <p><b>Brad Stowell</b><br/>Eagle Scout, Camp Little Lemhi counselor, promoted to camp program director</p> | <p><b>The Perpetrator</b><br/>Started molesting boys in 1988 at age 16. Admits to 24 victims in Blackfoot, at Scout Camp Little Lemhi and during his LDS mission in Alaska. Sentenced to 150 days in jail.</p>  | <p>Cannot leave Bonneville County for seven years. Now 32, married, working in RV sales. Probation forbids contact with kids and requires regular lie detector tests.</p> |
| <p><b>Judith Stowell</b><br/>mother of Brad Stowell, 18-year Scouting volunteer</p>                        | <p><b>Silent Mother</b><br/>Was on executive committee of Grand Teton Council, and from 1988 on, never told fellow Scout and Camp Little Lemhi leaders that her son confessed he molested a 6-year-old boy.</p> | <p>Retired Blackfoot High School teacher. No longer a Scout officer. Hall of Fame member, Grand Teton Council.</p>  |



B. Stowell



44° F  
NNW 4 mph



Partly Cloudy  
Weather data provided by weather.com®

Idaho Falls, ID

[Home](#)

**Tuesday  
October 23, 2007**

[News](#)

- A Section
- Community
- Nation / World
- Obituaries
- Opinion
- Sports
- The Moose
- The West
- Comics
- Post Talk

[Free Links](#)



- The Daily Miracle
- PRChat
- Multimedia
- Classifieds
- Place an ad
- Public Notices
- Breaking News
- Obituary Requests
- Forgot Password
- Contact Us
- Newsroom Staff
- Newsroom Ethics
- On Bridge



- Special Reports
- About Us
- Subscribe
- Subscriber Services
- Wallpaper
- Datebook
- Community Forms
- TV Times
- IdahoHomeFinder
- Yellowstone and the Region
- Scenic89.com

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <p><b>Lorin Talbot</b><br/>bishop of Stowell's LDS congregation</p> | <p><b>The Confessor</b><br/>Heard 16-year-old Brad Stowell's confession. Arranged counseling through LDS Social Services. Vouched for Stowell when Scout leaders inquired into tips that Stowell was a pedophile. Testified on his behalf at sentencing.</p> | <p>Released from his duties as bishop shortly after Stowell finished counseling. Did not learn of Stowell's abuse during mission until Feb. 26, 2005.</p> |
|---|--|---|

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Kim Hansen</b><br/>Grand Teton Council's paid director</p> | <p><b>Scouts' Apologist</b><br/>Reported to Grand Teton Council executive committee, which included Brad Stowell's mother, Judith. Responsible for youth-protection program.</p> | <p>Grand Teton Council's paid director. Any reports of improper activities by Scouts, Scout volunteers or Scout staff are to be sent through Hansen to national headquarters, which maintains the national eligibility list that is used to weed out those who do not uphold Boy Scout standards of behavior and morality.</p> |
|--|--|--|

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p><b>Jim Summers</b><br/>Camp Little Lemhi program director</p> | <p><b>The Recruiter</b><br/>Recruited Brad Stowell after being warned by a fellow teacher that Stowell was a pedophile.</p> | <p>No longer on the Boy Scouts of America's paid professional staff. No further information available.</p> |
|--|---|--|

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Brad Allen</b><br/>Grand Teton Council executive</p> | <p><b>The Investigator</b><br/>Investigated 1995 warning about Stowell by talking to Stowell and Stowell's LDS bishop, Lorin Talbot. Both said there was an "incident" with a 6-year-old boy, but assured him there was no problem. Allen not place Stowell on notice. He did not report Stowell's background to the Boy Scouts.</p> | <p>Promoted to director of a multistate Scout region, then promoted to director of the Boy Scouts' LDS Relations office in Salt Lake City.</p> |
|--|--|--|

Advertising Info

Help

TV Listings

[-Privacy-Policy-](#)

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Richard Snow</b><br/>Camp Little Lemhi program director</p>                                       | <p><b>The Perpetrator's Boss</b><br/>Hired Brad Stowell in 1995 after being told Stowell was a pedophile.</p>   | <p>Deceased</p>  |
| <p><b>Robert Fawcett</b><br/>Grand Teton Council director of camping and Camp Little Lemhi director</p> | <p><b>Another Boss</b><br/>Recruited Stowell to be camp program director, based on his observation of Stowell's "personal power" to motivate youths and adults. Admonished Stowell for sitting a boy on his lap and massaging the boy's back.</p> | <p>Promoted from a second-tier job at Grand Teton Council to top Scouting job with Maui County (Hawaii) Boy Scout council.</p> |
| <p><b>Elias Lopez</b><br/>Grand Teton Council district executive and Camp Little Lemhi director</p>     | <p><b>Hero or Goat?</b><br/>Rehired Stowell to be camp program director, admonished him in June to stop giving campers rides home, alone, from camp. Either called the police willingly or was forced to by campers.</p>                          | <p>Currently employed at a carpet store in Idaho Falls. No longer on Boy Scouts of America paid professional staff.</p>        |

Sources: Interviews, sworn testimony and exhibits from Bonneville County civil case CV-99-3416

[<<Part 4](#)

[Part 6 >>](#)

©Post Register



[<<Part 5](#)

[Home](#)

# Scouts' honor



By PETER ZUCKERMAN • PZUCKERMAN@POSTREGISTER.COM • AND POST REGISTER STAFF

COPYRIGHT 2005 POST REGISTER

## Taking the next step

### Molestation victims and their families have avenues for help

Nobody knows how many kids Brad Stowell molested. He confessed to preying on two dozen children, many of them while working at Camp Little Lemhi near Swan Valley. Using the Grand Teton Council's own numbers, he had access to about 7,000 Boy Scouts during the years he worked at camp.

Telling someone you've been molested is tough. Most people keep quiet or say something only when they're much older.

Here's what to do if you, your child or a friend has been molested by Stowell or someone else and some information on how to protect your family.

#### Did Stowell molest you?

Stowell was first questioned for molesting in 1988, the same year he began preying on campers, according to sworn statements. Here's where Stowell has worked at camp:

- 1988 as a first-aid teacher
- 1989-90 as a waterfront instructor and other jobs
- 1991 as assistant aquatics director

(From 1992-93, he was in Anchorage, Alaska, serving an LDS mission.)

- 1995 as aquatics director
- 1996-97 as camp program director

- 1998-present: business in Idaho Falls

### Here's what he looks like



B. Stowell

Many experts define "molested" as being touched by someone other than a medical professional in a way that makes the person feel uncomfortable in an area that would be covered by a bathing suit.

### Did someone else molest you?

Telling someone you've been molested is tough. Most people keep quiet or say something only when they're much older.

Here are some reasons to speak out:

- The molester may still be preying upon others. If you don't say something, more people may be hurt. Even if you were molested more than a decade ago, police and health officials say you should report it.
- Telling someone is the first step to getting help. The effects of being molested can ruin your life. Victims often feel humiliated, guilty or depressed. One of Stowell's victims was so afraid of men he had trouble shaking their hands.

Experts recommend you call people or organizations with experience working with sexual-abuse victims. If you don't feel comfortable with that, at least tell a friend or family member who can help.

If you were recently abused, don't take a shower or throw out your old clothes. That's evidence that detectives can use to catch the abuser. Call police as soon as you can.

### What if your child or friend was molested?

The most important thing you can do: Listen -- even if the victim has to tell you the story a dozen times.

Victims will rarely be direct, and a lot of times people won't believe them. Believe their story and be compassionate.

Victims will often tell you to keep their story a secret. If this happens, try to talk your friend into speaking to a teacher, a counselor or the police. Victims can call a hot line if they want to stay anonymous.

### What can you do to protect your family?

Most parents don't talk to their kids about sex abuse. It's stressful. It's embarrassing. Parents are busy. Few ever think their kids will become targets.

Estimates of the frequency of child abuse in the United States range from 1 in 7 children to 1 in 30. Experts say it's worth talking about.

Here's what to discuss:

- What sex abuse is. Young kids often don't know.

Estimates of the frequency of child abuse in the United States range from 1 in 7 children to 1 in 30. Experts say it's worth talking about



44° F

NNW 4 mph



Partly Cloudy

weather.com

Weather data provided by weather.com®

Idaho Falls, ID

### Home

Tuesday  
October 23, 2007

### News

- A Section
- Community
- Nation / World
- Obituaries
- Opinion
- Sports
- The Moose
- The West
- Comics
- Post Talk

### Free Links



- The Daily Miracle
- PRChat
- Multimedia
- Classifieds
- Place an ad
- Public Notices
- Breaking News
- Obituary Requests
- Forgot Password
- Contact Us
- Newsroom Staff
- Newsroom Ethics

On Bridge



Special Reports

About Us

Subscribe

Subscriber Services

Wallpaper

Datebook

Community Forms

TV Times

IdahoHomeFinder

Yellowstone and  
the Region

Scenic89.com

Advertising Info

Help

TV Listings

[Privacy Policy](#)

- Who they can talk to. A lot of children won't tell their parents, so give them ideas for others they can tell.

- Promise you won't get mad at them if they tell you. If they think you'll get mad, they'll probably stay quiet.

Consider finding out whether any sex offenders live near you. Go to the Web site [www.isp.state.id.us/so\\_viewer/search.jsp](http://www.isp.state.id.us/so_viewer/search.jsp)

### Legal stuff

- The statute of limitations on most child sex-abuse crimes is five years after the person turns 18. If you're younger than 23, you may still be able to press charges against someone who molested you many years ago.

- The statute of limitations on most civil cases is two years after the crime. There may be some exceptions if you were not given access to all the information.

### Whom to call

- Child Protection Services 24-Hour Crises Line: 528-5900

- Rape Response and Crime Victim Center 24-Hour Crises Line: 521-6018

- Idaho Falls Police Department: 529-1200

- Bingham County Sheriff's Office: 785-4440

- Butte County Sheriff's Office: 527-8553

- Fremont County Sheriff's Office: 624-4482

- Jefferson County Sheriff's Office: 745-9210

- Madison County Sheriff's Office: 356-5426

- Teton County Sheriff's Office: 354-2323

**Idaho Falls reporter Peter Zuckerman can be reached at 542-6750.**

---

## Now the story can be told

Eastern Idahoans knew in 1997 that Brad Stowell had been arrested at Camp Little Lemhi and had pleaded guilty to molesting Boy Scouts there.

What they don't know is what professional Scout leaders knew in the years leading up to that verdict and to the Boy Scouts' decision to pay two victims who sued for negligence.

That's because two of Idaho's most powerful law firms succeeded in having the files sealed.

Representing the Scouts are Gary Dance and Marvin Smith. Dance is a partner in

Moffatt Thomas, Barret Rock & Fields, about the fourth-largest law firm in Idaho, with 43 lawyers and offices in Boise, Idaho Falls, Pocatello and Twin Falls. Smith is a former district judge and a partner in Anderson Nelson Hall & Smith, the home firm of Blake Hall. Hall hosts national GOP figures who visit Idaho and is a confidant of Gov. Dirk Kempthorne. He is chairman of the Idaho Board of Education and is the national GOP representative from Idaho. Though small, his firm holds major state and county contracts for legal work.

The negligence lawsuits didn't appear in the courthouse public access computer until the Post Register noted in print that the ISTARs system was reporting that the cases didn't exist, a situation legal experts have called highly unusual.

Court officials say one case disappeared from public view because of a computer glitch that has since been fixed. That case, including Stowell's admission that he molested 24 children, has since been unsealed.

The Boy Scouts are still fighting to keep the other case closed to "protect the names of the innocent victims," said Kim Hansen, Grand Teton Council executive director. But the Post Register, by longstanding policy, does not print the names of the sex-crime victims without their consent. Nor do any other reputable media outlets.

Judge W.H. Woodland, who signed the secret order that removed all references to that second case from the courthouse's public record, announced Feb. 24 that he will soon rule on the Post Register's request to open the case.

[<<Part 5](#)

[Home](#)

©Post Register



# Nieman Reports

## Summer 2006 Issue

---

[Summer 2006 Table of Contents](#) > Reflections on Courage: United States > A Local Newspaper Endures a Stormy Backlash

### Reflections on Courage

#### United States

---

## A Local Newspaper Endures a Stormy Backlash

**'We had the opportunity to tell the story of powerless people who'd been hurt by powerful people who counted on the public never learning what they'd done.'**

By Dean Miller

Some days we felt like one of those plucky anglers in a small boat who solidly hooks a halibut, only to be beaten to death by the thrashing brute when it's hauled aboard. The Post Register is a wee dory of a newspaper: With 26,000 daily circulation, it's not buoyed by any corporate chain and has an opinion page often reviled in this livid corner of reddest Idaho for its reliable dissent.

Last year, by exposing Boy Scout pedophiles and those who failed to kick them out of the scouting program, we energized three of our community's big forces against us, including those most able to punish our newspaper -- the community's majority religion, the richest guys in town, and the conservative machine that controls Idaho.

First came the tip: A pedophile caught at a local scout camp in 1997 had not had two victims, as we reported at the time; he had dozens. When we went to the courthouse to look for the civil suit filed by these victims, the clerks (and the computers) said there was no such case. We later learned that the national Boy Scouts of America and its local Grand Teton Council had hired two of Idaho's best-connected law firms to seal the files and hide what came to be known as the Brad Stowell case.

The Post Register went to court in late 2004, and by January 2005 we'd dragged the case file into the light of day and read it from beginning to end. Turns out that as early as 1991 scout leaders had been warned about Stowell; they hired him again anyway. Top-level local and national leaders of the Mormon Church, which sponsors almost all Grand Teton Council scout troops, had also been warned, but to no effect. From these files we learned that while under investigation Stowell confessed his problem to his bishop in 1988 and had been sent to church counselors for sex abuser treatment. Seven years later, this bishop told scout executives he knew of no reason Stowell should not be a scout camp leader. The files also showed lawyers for the Boy Scout organization knew

---

The victims were probably asleep at the time, one lawyer said, and even if not, it was a bad memory best ignored.

about more victims, but never told those boys' parents. The victims were probably asleep at the time, one lawyer said, and even if not, it was a bad memory best ignored.

In February 2005, the Post Register launched a six-day series. The first day's story featured 14-year-old camper, Adam Steed, who forced adult leaders to call the cops on Stowell.

Steed was the son of a Mormon seminary teacher and a cinch to become an Eagle Scout. But he'd quit scouting and school; instead of being praised for his efforts to stop Stowell from harming others, scout leaders and fellow scouts had shunned him for bringing down this man whom they described as charming and accomplished.

---

**RELATED WEB LINK**

[Scouts' honor](#)

– Post Register Online

### **The Backlash Begins**

Rank-and-file church members were among the first to complain: "Are you a Christian?" a woman in her 70's hissed across the newsroom conference table at me Monday morning, as she quoted from scripture. Why had the paper dredged up this story, she wanted to know.

"The rest of the boys want justice," I replied.

"Tell 'em to get over it," she snarled. "Just tell 'em 'tough!'"

If hers represented the voice of our community, stormy weather was ahead. Though our stories were aimed at decisions made by the Grand Teton Council (which at 30,000 members is bigger than our newspaper's readership), some Mormon church members characterized our coverage as an attack on their faith. "The Church," as it's known here, dominates eastern Idaho even more than it does Salt Lake City. Some counties that our newspaper serves are more than 70 percent Mormon, and for generations scouting has been the official youth program for Mormon boys. More than 90 percent of the troops in our local Grand Teton Council are sponsored by Mormon congregations.

For four generations, the Post Register has been controlled by the Brady family, Irish Catholics, and Democrats, so there are readers who imagine liberal papists on every beat. They are encouraged in this belief by some local politicians and businessmen who benefit from making the paper Mormon Republicans' straw man. Even with careful editing to preserve only germane mentions of religious affiliation, we knew that some talk-radio hosts would start banging the "Post Register is anti-Mormon" drums.

The drums banged, and we were flooded with calls and e-mails and letters to the editor from readers who told us that holding the Grand Teton Council accountable was Mormon-bashing. We responded to every call, letter and e-mail we received. The backlash came from advertisers, too. One of our big advertising accounts, a man who runs a furniture store, demanded an explanation and angrily informed me Stowell was

a fine young man wrongly accused. Other advertisers just cancelled their ads, vowing never to return.

It's one thing to lose an account when you're an employee. It's quite another when you're also a stockholder; 140 employees hold close to 49 percent of the company's stock. For many families, this is their retirement. Many of them have been scouts or scout leaders, and at least a third are Mormon. Even non-newsroom staff were catching heat about the series at church gatherings and scout meetings. Even so, throughout this time most of what I heard inside our building were words of support.

With each additional day of the series, economic pressure built. Publisher Roger Plothow wrote an open letter to readers in which he criticized scout executives' decisions and said these stories were a victory for open public records. He was unapologetic and reminded readers he grew up Mormon and proudly claims the rank of Eagle Scout. A lot of what is popularly called courage is simple integrity. Plothow, by standing up with a stoic and clear-eyed defense, spoke for us, but also for the values of journalism.

### **Attacks Get Personal**

One month after the series ran, Stowell, who had served a brief jail term for his scout camp predations, violated his parole and was sent to prison for two to 14 years. Around this same time, Grand Teton Council staff had been telling volunteer scoutmasters that the stories were all lies cobbled together by a gay reporter on a vendetta against the Boy Scouts. Our reporter, Peter Zuckerman, was not "out" to anyone but family, a few colleagues at the paper (including me), and his close friends. When the magnitude of the story became evident, I vetted him thoroughly, making sure he had not been active in the debate over gay scouts and had not been kicked out of a troop.

Peter's personal life and the series itself went under the microscope in June when a local multimillionaire, Frank VanderSloot, began buying full-page critical ads in our Sunday paper. He devoted several paragraphs to establishing that Zuckerman is gay. He noted the Mormon Church opposes gay marriage and that the Boy Scouts no longer allow gay men to lead troops, but briefly added: "We think it would be very unfair for anyone to conclude that is what is behind Zuckerman's motives."

Strangers started ringing Peter's doorbell at midnight. His partner of five years was fired from his job. Despite the harassment, Peter kept coming to work and chasing down leads on other pedophiles in the Grand Teton Council, while continuing to cover his courts and cops beat. I spoke at his church one Sunday and meant it when I said that I hope my son grows into as much of a man as Peter had.

The local Boy Scout executive had declared Stowell was the only child molester he'd discovered in the Grand Teton Council. But by midsummer, the paper was hunting for documentation on a dozen leaders whom victims and their families

had identified to us as pedophiles. Meanwhile, the Post Register kept on printing VanderSloot's ads, even when they included serious mischaracterizations, errors of fact, and glaring omissions, such as the fact that the Boy Scouts' national staffer in charge of youth protection had just pleaded guilty to trading in child pornography. VanderSloot said his ads, which he labeled "The Community Page," were intended to bolster people who were too scared of the mighty Post Register to speak up.

---

With each additional day of the series, economic pressure built.

But no one who was named in our articles asked for a correction, retraction or clarification. They couldn't and still had not a year later. The stories were based on information in deposition transcripts found in the secret lawsuit file. Not satisfied with the impact of his ads, VanderSloot demanded a debate. Insiders had warned us not to pick fights with VanderSloot. He owns an international multilevel marketing/health products company, Melaleuca, Inc., and often threatens to start a rival newspaper. But we felt we couldn't run away from this challenge, so we agreed to two half-hour debates on a local TV station.

A few minutes into the debate it became clear to me that VanderSloot had not, as I had, read the entire case file or even the most significant depositions. Broad assertions that had been prepared for him by a young lawyer fell apart in the face of details from the court record. The day after the first debate aired, the Post Register published documentation that at least two other pedophiles had preyed on Grand Teton Council scouts, including a vicious child rapist who had been reported to the Grand Teton Council in the 1980's, convicted in Utah, and was now back at work for the council. Two weeks later, we documented another pedophile in the council. In this case, his criminal file had been sealed and hidden.

By now the paper had secured evidence of four recent pedophiles in the local scout council, about as many documented cases as the 500,000-member Catholic diocese of Boston when that scandal erupted in The Boston Globe.

### **Losing the Company President's Support**

Full-page VanderSloot ads kept arriving -- a half dozen in all. The last declared victory. His words weren't hurting our circulation -- which was rising -- but we were growing tired of the smear campaign. VanderSloot did score a victory in the fall. In the September 23rd Post Register, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Jerry Brady published an open letter headlined with Will Rogers' quip: "The only thing wrong with Boy Scouts is there aren't enough of them." Brady recited a litany of the benefits of scouting, pledged his and his wife's support, and said "We regret any negativity that might be associated with the great Boy Scouts organization ... the entire community should support the scouts."

Brady is the president of the Post Company and serves as chairman of its board.

Religion, "big" money, and the conservative movement's rabid protection of local scout leaders had gotten to our boss.

Now the newsroom was really on its own as we started to cover the lobbying campaign of Paul Steed, father of the boy who forced the Grand Teton Council to turn Stowell over to the cops. The elder Steed had quit his Mormon Church job to push for changes in Idaho law. He was the kind of divisive force that Brady scolded in his campaign ad. But then Idaho surprised us. When the Republican-dominated legislature convened in January, a sympathetic legislator introduced the Steed family's proposal. A flinching and at times tearful house committee heard the awful stories in testimony from the wounded boys and their parents. The lawmakers unanimously voted to do away with the statute of limitations on child molestation, and the governor signed the bill into law with the Steeds and Jeff Bird, another scout victim, standing by. The house committee chairman wrote to the Grand Teton Council to ask why its leader had not been fired.

---

Laboring in obscurity, and without resources their peers at larger papers have, community journalists often end up dreaming small. But my 34 colleagues at the Post Register -- in particular the cadre of editors who have worked together for a decade and lead a largely entry-level staff -- refused to pull back in the face of much opposition.

### **What Courage Means**

Judges called the Post Register's coverage of this story "courageous" when they awarded it the Scripps Howard First Amendment prize. That's a hard word for those of us at the paper to wear comfortably. After all, we'd witnessed the courage of Adam Steed and his younger brother, Ben, and Jeff Bird when, as grown men, they went public in the paper and revealed humiliating details of what had been done to them at scout camp. Even now, we fear for them and their families, as VanderSloot's full-page attack ads continue.

But was what any of us did courageous? With no corporate bankroll to fall back on and coping with the pressures any newspaper publisher faces today, our publisher, Roger Plothow, took lonely risks to uphold the principle of open government. In doing so, he gave victims the opportunity they needed to speak out against those who had harmed them. By his example, Plothow stiffened the spines of minority stockholders (many of whom are staff members at the paper), who stood firm.

Laboring in obscurity, and without resources their peers at larger papers have, community journalists often end up dreaming small. But my 34 colleagues at the Post Register -- in particular the cadre of editors who have worked together for a decade and lead a largely entry-level staff -- refused to pull back in the face of much opposition. They were dogged in their work until the victims' stories -- and the aftermath of their telling -- were complete. Peter Zuckerman, in particular, persevered despite repeated threats that were inflamed by a carefully orchestrated ad hominem attack on him and his work.

One of the sweeter moments of our year occurred when we received figures from our circulation audit. While the sales numbers of other U.S. newspapers were in free fall, we were among the nation's faster growing daily papers. For us, these numbers testified to the value of fortitude. Publishing uncomfortable truths needn't be an act of hot-blooded courage; it should be a cool-headed exercise in focus: Find the civic heart of a story, steer a steady course to it, and serve the public's legitimate interests in openness and justice. Do that and, even when the story rocks your boat, trust that the waves won't capsize it.

*Dean Miller is managing editor of the Post Register in Idaho Falls, Idaho. For his work on this series, Peter Zuckerman won the Livingston Award in the category of local reporting, a prize recognizing the nation's best journalists under the age of 35.*

[Table of contents](#)  
[Printer-friendly format](#)

---

[The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University](#)

Lippmann House  
One Francis Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02138, U.S.A.  
Telephone: (617) 495-2237  
Fax: (617) 495-8976

© 2006 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College