

March 2014

My dear friend

Annie was the youngest of two children and was her father's favorite. Her family was quite well off and her father, mother, brother and herself lived together quite happily. She attended a fairly good school and was doing well in her studies and active in the extra-curricular activities.

Then disaster struck. When she was 14 years old, without any warning, her father had a heart attack and died. The sudden shock to the family was enormous but particularly for Annie who was doted on by her father.

She began to withdraw into herself and was spending more and more time in her bedroom surfing the internet and chatting with other teenagers whom she met online. She seldom went out and did not seem to have much contact with classmates whom she had previously considered her friends. Her mother seemed to be at a loss what to do. She herself was grieving for the loss of her husband and at the same time trying to help her daughter get through this difficult period. She had little idea of what her daughter was doing on the internet.

Later on, it came to light that one of the people she had come into contact with online was a 19 year old boy. They had never met and all she knew about him was what he himself told her online. But as time passed, he charmed her into believing that they were in love. Perhaps this fitted in with her need for a male figure who loved her.

They agreed to meet for a movie – which seemed harmless enough. Then there was another movie and dinner followed by various outings and picnics. Then she went up to the place where he lived and eventually they had sexual relations. She was not yet 16 years old. This “boy” was connected to the triads and later on, when the case eventually came to court it transpired that he was in fact 22 years old.

By this time Annie was beginning to feel uncomfortable with the way things were going. It seemed to her that each time they met less and less time was being spent on movies, dinners and outings and almost all the time on physical intimacy of one kind or another. She decided to end the relationship. But it turned out that it was not going to be so simple.

When she first told the young man that she did not want to see him any more he began to phone her at all times of the day and night. Annie had no choice but to tell her mother what it was all about. But at first she did not say anything about physical intimacy. Next he began hanging around near her home and outside her school. But Annie was very firm. She wanted it to end.

Then things began to get really nasty. He told her that he had taken intimate photographs of her when she had visited his apartment and if she did not keep going out with him, he would put them on the internet for everyone to see. This time, of course she had to tell her mother exactly what had happened and what was going. Her mother too was very firm and very direct. She went with her daughter to see the school social worker; told her what had happened and asked for help. It was obvious to the social worker that this would have to be reported to the police. Once the police got involved things began to move along quite quickly.

Annie was asked to keep in touch with this man and gather information that would be useful in a prosecution. However in order to have some control over the situation the police wanted Annie to move away from home and stop going to school for a while. This is how Annie came to stay with us at Youth Outreach. We had to make sure that wherever she went one of our workers accompanied her and make sure that she was not the target of unwanted attention. We also had to help the whole family cope with anxiety and fear created by these events and the turmoil in their family life.

Eventually, the case came before the courts. Unfortunately, the newspapers got wind of it. Then reporters began looking for Annie. After the man had been arrested, she thought it would be safe to go back home and go back to school. But once again it seemed she was in need of protection and support and so she continued to stay with us.

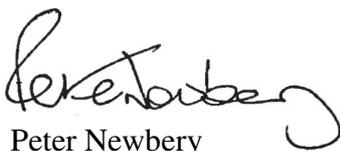
The young hoodlum was given a custodial sentence. But for Annie and her mother the questions remained. Should they move house? Should Annie change schools? How could they repair the chaos created in their lives?

In the end, Annie's mother decided to move house. But despite all the upheaval, anxiety and fear, Annie still seemed to be doing well at the school she attended and the familiar environment and a group of friends gave her a sense of security. So it was decided that she should keep going to the same school. After all it was easier to avoid unwanted attention at school where help was always at hand than it was at home.

Annie is now able to live her life in peace and start re-building her future. But she will never forget the events of those months. The anonymity of the internet has made it a place where the naïve and the ignorant are so easily abused by the callous and the cunning.

I feel glad that we at Youth Outreach were able reach out and protect her so that no further harm could come to her. From time to time she comes back to Youth Outreach to visit the social workers and knows that there is always a place for her here and friends who will support her and care for here.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Newbery', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peter Newbery
Executive Director