

# Former minister 'pure evil,' victim's mother says

Pridham sentenced to two years for sexual exploitation, child pornography possession

MIKE PEELING  
mpeeling@brantnews.com  
BRANT NEWS

Former Brantford minister Barry Pridham faces two years in prison after pleading guilty to sexual exploitation of a 17-year-old girl and possession of child pornography.

Justice Robert Gee sentenced Pridham, 65, to two years less a day and three years on probation based on a joint submission from assistant Crown attorney Larry Brock and defence lawyer Jeff Manishen.

Brock told the court the victim and her family had been attending Sydenham Street United Church, where Pridham worked for decades, for 12 years before he was charged in August 2014. The family had been invited to his home numerous times for barbecues and other functions.

Brock said the victim has a developmental delay that puts her cognitive, social and emotional level at no more than that of a 12-year-old, yet when she was a toddler doctors said she would likely never walk

or talk.

"Community support has made her a successful young woman," Brock said. He added that the victim considered Pridham to be a grandfather figure to her.

According to an agreed statement of facts, Pridham convinced the teen to send him pornographic photos of herself in various states of undress by text message.

The girl's mother discovered the photos and text messages, which police traced to Pridham's phone, requesting the victim send him sexually explicit photos of her body.

Pridham told her not to mention any of these texts and photos to her parents.

Brantford police officers seized a computer from Pridham in which they found 114 images of child pornography – 35 of which were of the victim – along with pictures of children ranging from toddlers to 13 years old. The pornography found included images of toddlers being forced to perform sex acts on adults. Investigators also found evidence of computer searches for live video streams of pre-pubescent girls performing sexual acts.

Brock pointed out that Pridham had no previous criminal record.

In a victim impact statement written by the victim, which Brock read aloud, she said she is no longer able to help the little kids in the Sunday school program at church, nor can she trust men or feel safe when she goes out.

She blames Pridham for using his relationship with her estranged brother to gain her trust, and take advantage of it with a promise to reunite them.

"I never want to see his face or hear his voice again," she wrote of Pridham.

The victim's brother, who was in the courtroom, wrote that Pridham could have sought counselling for his problem before victimizing his sister.

"You knew it was wrong, so now you'll get counselling in jail," he wrote.

Her brother feels like he is to blame, and has been hospitalized due to suicidal tendencies as a result.

The victim's mother, who read her statement to the court, said she has always been overprotective of her daughter, but let her guard down for Pridham.

"The true measure of any society is how we treat our most vulnerable citizens," she said, looking at Pridham. "You, sir, have failed in your role as a man of God who is supposed to care for them. Shame on you. I have failed as a mother to protect my child because of you."

She said her daughter looked at Pridham as a mentor whose friendship she didn't want to lose.

"You took her innocence and used her intellectual disadvantages to fulfill your sick fantasies," she said. "Did you feel she was less important because of her mental disability? Well, her life and feelings do matter. And now we're left to pick up the pieces."

She called Pridham "pure evil," adding that there is no Bible story that can justify his actions.

The family no longer attends church because the victim felt at home in Sydenham Street United Church, but Pridham's actions have shaken her faith. "I don't believe in God as much since all this happened," she told her mom.

The victim's father read a statement claiming that if Pridham felt real remorse

for his actions, he would have pleaded guilty a year ago, not waited 21 months.

However, both Gee and Brock said Pridham's guilty plea is legally considered a sign of remorse.

Brock said that in his experience, Pridham is the first person accused of such offences to so quickly "take steps to address his problem" after being arrested.

Brock said that he believes Pridham's behaviour and tendencies can be managed.

Manishen defended the lengthy court process before Pridham's plea by saying it allowed the legal system to handle the case through psychological assessment, rehabilitation and visits to doctors.

The process, he said, uncovered that Pridham "may have had bipolar disorder" and depression, and was sexually abused when he was young.

The victim's parents left the courtroom when Pridham took his opportunity to speak.

"My deepest regret to all I have hurt," Pridham said. "I offer my deepest apology for this betrayal of trust. I've never denied as a minister of religion that I

chose to take advantage of a vulnerable young woman. I should have known better."

Pridham apologized to his wife for destroying their relationship, and thanked her for continuing to stick by him.

He also apologized to his two sons and two daughters, who were also in the courtroom, and his grandchildren.

"I'm embarrassed and ashamed," he said. "The father you once saw as a mentor is now a social outcast. I ask your forgiveness."

Referring to more than 30 letters of reference Manishen filed as exhibits in the sentencing, the judge said they didn't in any way detract from the gravity of the criminal acts to which Pridham admitted.

"The people who wrote those character references, they don't see this side of you," Gee said to Pridham.

"Because in private, you are a different person. There's a saying that goes, 'A man's character can't be judged by what he does when people are watching, it's what he does when they aren't watching.'

"That's the man I'm sentencing today."

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## VETERAN DETECTIVES SHARE STORIES OF PTSD

Jim Smyth and Chris Nicholas keynote speakers at St. Leonard's mental health forum

MIKE PEELING  
mpeeling@brantnews.com  
BRANT NEWS

After more than 20 years as a provincial police officer, Chris Nicholas didn't think his work could get to him until he helped catch Russell Williams.

"I've seen every way a person could get murdered," he told a group gathered for St. Leonard's Community Services' sixth annual Mental Health Forum on Friday, which this year focused on post-traumatic stress disorder. "But I never had any problems. I thought I was strong."

Early in his career Nicholas apprehended a man twice his size he believed was caught stealing a car, but he later learned the man was suspected of cutting the head off a man. He also happened to be a highly trained member of the air force.

As an undercover officer working the illegal drug trade, a friendly couple who lived in his building were killed.

Yet Nicholas said he was surprised to see how the deaths affected a fellow officer.

"What we do isn't all tickets and teddy bears," Nicholas said. "What did he think he was getting into

when he became a police officer?"

In 2010, Nicholas was a major homicide case manager when his team arrested former air force colonel Russell Williams and charged him with the brutal murders of two women, two sexual assaults and numerous disturbing fetish thefts.

Videos Williams had taken of the women he brutalized were found, but Nicholas was determined not to allow anyone to watch them unless absolutely necessary. He had seen the devastating effects on people who watched videos taken by another killer.

A doctor for Williams' legal team watched the video and reportedly had to pull his car off the road several times as he drove home.

"I can't stand most TV shows about police," Nicholas said, citing their lack of realism. "But when you watch someone begging for their lives, it's real.

"I think that after that day, my life changed."

Nicholas said he met with a mental health professional and joked that he wasn't sure if he was a psychologist or psychiatrist.

"I make fun because it's a coping mechanism," he said.

He recalled one day

during the Williams investigation when he was in a meeting with his team members.

"The five or six of us all started crying uncontrollably," Nicholas said. "Now I cry very easily. The doctor explained to me that everyone has a line, and for some it's very thin. But for me, it was very thick."

Now Nicholas says he sees Williams behind his own furnace – a place Williams hid while waiting for a target – and dwells on old cases and how he could have handled them differently. But he also took his doctor's advice to eat better, exercise and lost 40 pounds.

"I'm glad I went to see that doctor, whatever he was," he said. "(PTSD) will never go away, but you learn to deal with it ... He saved my life. Not that I would have taken my own life, but I think my life is better because of it."

Jim Smyth said he was promoted to detective with York Regional Police because he couldn't let cases go.

As a uniformed officer, Smyth would hand off cases to investigators, but often bugged them about where they were with the cases.

Smyth became one of the first York officers to join a new team established to investigate child abuse and sexual assault cases.

After a few years with the team, Smyth didn't think the work was getting to him, but then he saw evidence of PTSD sneaking out.

On a day off, Smyth took a boat trip with his wife and young son. As they left the boat, his wife told him

a man had "flashed" their son.

Smyth began looking around for the man and his wife asked him what he was doing. Smyth told her he was looking for the man who flashed their son.

"I didn't say flashed, I said splashed," he recalled her saying. "I felt so silly, but it made me take a step back. I went to my boss and told him I need to try something different."

As a constable Smyth spent shifts patrolling Wasaga Beach's main street in plain clothes with a partner. A call came over his radio that a drunk refused entry into a bar had a gun. By the time Smyth and his partner arrived at the bar, the drunk was riding off on a bike with saddle bags.

Smyth asked him to stop. The suspect looped around to come back towards the bar. Smyth saw him put his hand in a saddlebag, leaving the officer no other option than to draw his firearm.

The suspicious cyclist fell over on his bike and Smyth learned it was a bag of pot in the man's bag.

"Then I felt a gun pressed to the back of my head," Smyth said.

It was a uniformed officer who had received a call about a man with a gun, who turned out to be Smyth.

Smyth took a couple days off and went on a road trip to deal with the situation, but the uniformed officer quit her job after that.

"She couldn't deal with the fact that she had put a gun to the head of another officer," he said. "She did everything right."

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Former prostitute Karishma Bunton, who was forced into the sex trade at 13, in her Brantford apartment.  
 PHOTO BY MIKE PEELING, BRANT NEWS

# ESCAPING 'THE TRADE'

## TEEN SEX TRAFFICKING SURVIVOR DONE WITH LIFE OF PROSTITUTION

MIKE PEELING  
 mpeeling@brantnews.com  
 BRANT NEWS

**K**arishma Bunton has had a burn mark on her body since she was a teenager. Or as her former pimp describes it: a brand to remind her she will always belong to him.

"I told him he can't control me anymore, that I was done," Bunton said of the last time they spoke.

Bunton, now 31, spent more than half her life being sold to men for sexual purposes, also known as human trafficking and procuring in the Criminal Code of Canada. Escaping that life has been almost as difficult as escaping that brand.

Born and raised in Brant-

ford, Bunton was often sick and hospitalized as a child, the reason she believes her father left the family when she was very young.

When she was nine years old, a man close to her family started sexually abusing Bunton, which is not her birth name, but it will be her new legal name.

The abuse continued until she was 13, when her abuser realized he had friends who would have sex with her and were willing to pay for it.

Now her pimp, he would take Bunton to truck stops – in a different jurisdiction – pay for a motel room and bring in men one after another to rape her.

Bunton said because she was groomed for prostitution from such an early age, she didn't know better.

“I thought it was normal. I was already being abused. I thought all my friends were doing it. I thought that was how you learned to be a girl.”

"I thought it was normal," she said. "I was already being abused. I thought all my friends were doing it. I thought that was how you learned to be a girl."

After she started high school and girl talk turned more to sex, Bunton realized her friends were not having the same kind of experiences.

"I knew a lot of things they didn't," she said. "It made me look like a pervert. They called me slut, skank."

Since she was forced into prostitution as a child, Bunton has met other girls and women in the trade and says she personally knows about 20 in Brantford and Brant.

"It's hidden a lot in Brantford," she said. "People think it's not a problem here, but it is."

Bunton learned early on that life in "The Trade" could be dangerous if she didn't co-operate with the men raping her.

The first time she refused a man something, he pointed a gun at her head. "After that, I would stay

quiet, and do what they wanted me to do," she said.

Bunton turned to drugs to deal with the trauma of her life as a sex slave. First it was marijuana, but she found that didn't do enough to quiet her fears and pain.

After getting badly hurt, she was prescribed Percocet, found the effect potent and learned to crush and sniff the pills to amplify the effect.

"On Percocet, I wouldn't know what I was feeling anymore," she said.

Her drug abuse has haunted her ever since. She would get clean, then relapse, a pattern that repeated several times as she struggled to leave the sex trade, suffering awful

nightmares, flashbacks and anxiety over how people see her.

Bunton's need for drug money drove her to return to prostitution, even after she got away from her pimp two years ago.

Her breaking point came a year ago when a john came to her apartment in Brantford and assaulted her for seven hours. It wasn't the first time she was beaten by a john, but it was particularly brutal.

"I can't sleep in the bedroom anymore because of what happened," she said. "I didn't know if I would live through it."

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## ▶ ESCAPING THE TRADE

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

The next day she saw two of her counsellors, both of whom begged her to go to the hospital. She was black and blue, and could barely walk.

She tried to resist, insisting she could sleep it off as she had in the past, but they were persistent and she ended up at the hospital.

Hearing the extent of her injuries pushed Bunton to make a vow, "I'm done."

Her family doctor said to her, "I pray for you every night."

Hearing that for the first time, Bunton's resolve to get away from prostitution only strengthened. Bunton said she couldn't find an organization in Brantford that has what she calls "exit services" to help women held hostage escape the sex trade.

She did find an Ontario group called Rising Angels ([www.risingangels.net](http://www.risingangels.net)), which was founded by Katarina MacLeod, a survivor of exploitation, sexual and physical abuse, drug addiction, kidnapping, domestic prostitution and trafficking.

Rising Angels took Bunton to a safe house in a location she won't tell anyone to this day, not even her best friend. As much as her friend resented being

shut out for three months, Bunton was forgiven and got away from the trade.

Over those three months in seclusion, Bunton missed her home, friends, family and dogs, but she also learned to play the piano, enjoyed simple things she missed out on as a child like playing on a swing set and learned she loved being near water.

"I wasn't a hooker there," she said. "I started to feel like a person. In the trade, you don't feel like a person."

Bunton plans on moving because she still has Johns knocking on her door. Her pimp hasn't been brought to justice, nor have any of the men who have assaulted her.

Unfortunately, she says most social services are still not equipped to help women who have been victims of human trafficking since they were too young to know any better. Police officers, she has found, too often aren't trained to handle someone in her situation and her complaints over the years have gone nowhere.

Women's shelters have told her they can't take her because she wasn't victimized by someone she lived with, and that she should just not allow her attackers into her home.

Bunton says she finds groups such as St. Leonard's Community Services,

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and Sexual Assault Centre of Brant helpful, but that the services she needs are too fragmented or non-existent. "Too often I find I'm teaching them something," she said. "I don't want to teach them, I want them to help me."

When she was still in the trade, she relied a lot on Elizabeth Fry Society's STARS (Sex Trade Alternate Resource Services), which can be contacted at 905-527-3097, ext. 230 and ext. 240.

Since leaving the trade, the most helpful programs Bunton participates in are OASIS, a concurrent disorder group by CMHA Brant and St. Leonard's at Brantford Welcome In Resource Centre, 305 West St., Thursdays from 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. and Hopeful Journeys on Fridays at the same time. Both groups are open to the community and require no referral.

Bunton also completed the St. Leonard's women's day treatment program, which can be contacted at [www.st-leonards.com](http://www.st-leonards.com) or call 519-759-7188 or 1-866-811-7188 for integrated mental health and addictions crisis services.

Rising Angels can be contacted at [info@risingangels.net](mailto:info@risingangels.net) or [katarinamaclod@gmail.com](mailto:katarinamaclod@gmail.com).

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