

TESTIMONY

of

MARGARET D'ALE SANDRO

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

UNLAWFUL PERSUASION IN FALSE
REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE

May 6, 1993

TESTIMONY OF MARGARET D'ALESSANDRO

I often hear that Children & Youth Services is understaffed for lack of funds. The results are that some of the children fall through the cracks. How sad! These children will be denied the safety and security of a normal childhood.

It seems to me that it is a waste of time and money to only interview the accused and not take the time to investigate the situation to verify the conditions a child lives under.

After C & Y spoke with my daughter-in-law, it took two hours to dismiss the charges as "unfounded". My daughter-in-law, Sue, told the case worker that she was going through a vicious divorce and that her ex-husband or mother-in-law must have filed the charges against her. She made the comment "I can handle C & Y, but I don't like anyone going against me". I was told by the Child Hotline that I should call the office and ask why the report was handled the way it was. I was also told to follow up with a letter that explained how I was drawn into the situation since it was not my son or myself who initiated the charges against Sue.

I spoke with Mr. Bollie for two hours on the phone and sent a five page letter. I received no response to either. I was only told that I could file a complaint of my own if I had something to tell. I was already being blamed for filing a complaint that I had nothing to do with. Sue's lawyer was threatening that she had a copy of my five page letter in her hand at the custody hearing for my grand-daughter, Chris.

Sue has always made subtle threats to make sure that no one "crossed" her or complained about things that went on in her home. My son could not live the life that Sue wanted. He did not leave when he wanted to for fear that Sue would keep him from seeing his daughter Chrissy. In May 1988, he left because of a friend of Sue's that she let move in with them. She saw no problem in his moving in because it was only temporary. After all, he had been arrested and was awaiting sentencing for drug and firearm charges. She was just being a good friend. My son then found papers granting Immunity from Prosecution from testimony that Sue had given regarding a trip she had taken with a young man from Pittsburgh and her daughter Corrine, then 8 years old. After giving testimony regarding the 1982 Florida trip, the young man was murdered. Shot in the face.

The friend who moved in, in May 1988 has had an appeal before the Superior Court of Allegheny County on July 5, 1992. He was sentenced in Criminal Court for 10 to 15 years on drug and firearm charges along with violations in his probation stemming from 1987 charges.

Our grandchild Christina was born on July 20, 1986. She had a very short time to be a baby or a toddler because of the lifestyle Sue chose to live. She spent most of her 1st year in a swing with a bottle propped in her mouth by the tray on the seat. A blanket was placed over her head and Sue played a tape recording of a fan and sweeper. She said Chris liked this, but it only drowned out

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her cries. We broke this horrible sleep habit when we started taking every Wednesday and Thursday. This "vacation" was at Sue's request. She wanted to have time for the family without Chrissy there. She thought it was important for my son's relationship with her two daughters to continue to grow. At this time, Corrine was 13 years old and Leita was 2 1/2.

From May 1989 until November 1990, Sue had a live-in boyfriend who was arrested in November 1989 on drug and firearm charges, also. They had been going on unscheduled weekend trips to Atlantic City and would also return at unpredicted times. Sues's mother, sister and Leita would stand by with Chrissy and our FAMILY TO FIND OUT WHAT DAY AND TIME THEY WOULD BE GETTING BACK.

Sue then, would take Chrissy and Leita to Ambridge at night to surprise Gregg when he stopped coming around. They even got lost one night in a \$100.00 car she had bought because Gregg and his buddy were using the car she bought after Ray left.

Gregg, the companion at that time, had permission to spank the girls, as they always do, did spank Chrissy when she came into her mother's room. He made a fist at her and warned her not to come out of her room. She was also told to go with him in his car to the store, "or else". Guess where mom was at this time? SLEEPING!" Sue got radical when she found out about Chrissy getting smacked. She twisted the story and said Ray got Chrissy to say this. I reminded Sue that Ray had no idea that Gregg comes into apartment, she'll have to try again the story won't fly.

We have had so many insinuations of impropriety, supposedly, hinted at us when she has something to cover up. She has been living her life without regard for the little girls. Of course she describes herself as the best ---- mother anyone could be. She wanted to leave the state and go to find her second husband in the state of Indiana. She wanted to leave in a car that had to be in the garage twice the following week that she wanted to go. The man did not go along with her plans - he was still with his wife and wouldn't meet them. She was to leave at 2:30 a.m. after working the bar. Icy roads..

We know what wicked stories she can make up. She tried to set her sister Darlene to take the blame for bruises on Leita. "I brought ice cubes for you to use when you punch Leita in the face or bruise her so the school doesn't see bruises". We found out that Leita had been thrown into her bedroom, against her bed and was bruised. At this time, Chrissy was being put into the closet until she talked words, not cried them. Chrissy told my counselor this but said it happened when she was a baby. More of Sue's brainwashing when she is found out.

Sue covered this like she covered a story that she spent two hours on the phone telling Chrissy that she and Grandma would protect her from her bad daddy. I told her that she

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better stop brainwashing Chrissy and let her go to sleep. She said that she told her lawyer that I would lie for her. I never said that I would lie for anyone. We were already getting Chrissy four and five days a week without Sue's lawyer. Chrissy was still small and required more attention than Sue wanted to give. She has even admitted to the fact that Gregg took two years of her little girls' lives.

We have medical records that show that Sue rarely took Chris to the doctor and if she did, didn't follow the doctor's orders and brought Chrissy back to be checked. She would have bad headaches and very high fevers when we picked her up on Friday nights. Once, she had a very bad bruise on her forearm and said that her mother wouldn't look at it because "she had no business being outside anyway". We took care of it and requested the school look at it during the next week. When Chrissy fell down cement steps, her story didn't match the story that her mother told the doctor. She whimpered and told us that "It hurt so bad that I thought I was going to die".

We are now having a problem concerning Chrissy's nine year old half sister. She begs to come over with Chrissy on weekends but, we are afraid of Sue telling lies about us like the many lies we have heard about others before. She even convinced Chris' sister Leita to tell lies about us when she went for counseling. Chrissy told us that Leita was sorry she told the counselor lies about us. She then told us "Grandma, I had to tell those stories about you so Mommy wouldn't make up worse ones."

Sue tells her that I call her and tell her the things that Chrissy tells us. She tricks Chrissy with this lie to find out if Chrissy tells us what goes on at her Mother's home. There are so many storeies told to her to brainwash and manipulate her. Her mother told her that we were always mean to her when she was a baby and she had to sing and dance with Chrissy to get her to fall asleep at night. Oh, how I wish that were true. To this day, Sue probably spends an average of two hours each day with those two little girls.

Chrissy tells us when we take her to her mothers that we don't really love her or we wouldn't make her go home. She says that her mother only likes to torture them. She says "You lie when you say that you'll punch anyone who hurts me." Mommy hurts me and hits me on top the head alot. She told friends who were camping with us last year, that her mother says "I hate you both" to her and her sister. We tried to tell her that her mom didn't really mean that and she became upset and said " You don't want to listen either."

We were discussing the minister's sermon after church one Sunday, explaining that "God loves everyone". Chrissy said, in amazement, "He loves everyone?" My daughter answered "Yes, everyone". Chrissy looked puzzled and asked if he liked people who hurt kids. Her aunt said that he didn't like people who hurt others. Chrissy looked into both our faces and said "My mommy hurts me". I can't describe the emotion that filled the room.

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We were puzzled for almost a year at the strange shaped black and blue marks on Chrissy's hips. Chrissy accidentally let the source of these strange marks out one day. While on the phone with Sue one day, Chrissy started to cry and wouldn't stop. When we picked her up that Friday, I ask her why she was crying so hard that night while I was on the phone. She replied "You'd cry hard to if someone was digging her nails into you." I asked her what she was talking about. She explained that she had dropped gravy on the floor and her mother was scolding her. She went on and told us that her mother digs her nails into her to get her attention when she's scolding her.

During Chrissy's Kindergarten year, she was the only child at her bus stop. A bus stop that's right along a four lane highway. The driveway of the apartment complex is wide and there was no crossing guard. Leita would get Chrissy up for school and Chrissy would get herself off to school. Her mother would sleep until late in the afternoon. Not only did she miss Chris going in the morning, but Chris would have to get off the bus alone at noon and let herself in the apartment. She was not allowed to make noise and awaken her mother. Leita came home at 3:30 PM and they had to both stay quiet until 5:00 PM when Sue got up.

I could not bear the thought of her, so little, standing along that highway. I would drive over when I knew she was coming or going and watch to see she was okay. I would stay hidden in a parking lot so she would not see the car. I told the police and the school that I was doing this because with her mother sleeping the day away, it would be hours before anyone would know if anything had happened to her. This fear was partially due to a fall that Chrissy took on the ice. She was wearing shoes that were two sizes too big and lost her footing on the icy sidewalk. She fell against the curb and hurt her leg. She crawled into the street to retrieve her shoe, then crawled up the sidewalk and into the apartment. I ask her if she cried and she said "No, I would have woke up Damien" Damien was the live-in babysitter at that time.

We always try to make Chrissy feel that she is loved by her Mother. I don't feel it is fair for any child to feel that their mother doesn't love them. I don't know what to say when she replies with "Grandma, you're lying to me".

She must get into cars with any of her mother's friends. There have been times that she has had to go with them the same day she met them. There is an older man that used to take her to a nearby park so her mother could sleep. He took her to Sandcastle, a water park, and let her go down the high slide. At her age, this was too risky and even worse when you consider her mother was not along. Chrissy would say she felt "funny" being with "big people" she didn't know.

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Chrissy asks when she can talk to ^{over} a judge and tell him that she wants to live here with Daddy. Sue has threatened to send Leita to an institution because of her "smart mouth". Leita was also in trouble when she confided in a teacher last year and cried that she was afraid that she couldn't take care of Chrissy good enough. Although they have the normal rivalry between sisters, the tension is almost non-stop with Sue's method of "Divide & Conquer". It is sad that a mother has to keep her children under control by causing trouble between them.

I thank God that Chrissy doesn't understand some of the things that have been brainwashed into her little mind. Her innocence is clearly a result of the time she spends away from her mother. I hope that innocence can endure whatever the future holds for her.

We need to make changes in the system to stop innocent people from getting hurt anymore. There have to be severe penalties for those who inflict torment on other, whether they be the children or those who love them. I cannot begin to tell the heartache we feel over the lost childhood of our Chrissy or the others like her. If one looks closely at the faces of the many children betrayed by the adults who have been entrusted to protect them, it is clear that the system is not working!

The only time that Sue was asked to pick Chrissy up if she wanted her home that evening, Sue pulled into the driveway with our neighbors in our yard and called out "For a college GRADUATE, YOU SURE ARE STUPID, THINK ABOUT IT!" Was this a threat?