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FRONTLINE SCOTLAND

"Quarriers "

Reporter: Samantha Poling**Interview: Helen Porteous**

SAMANTHA: Take me how, when and why you decided to become a house parent.

HELEN: It's something I fought against when I was younger. My parents had been house parents during Quarriers and it was something I said I'm not going to do that. And when I left school I went to work in a lawyers office in Glasgow. And I just felt drawn to do this kind of work and I did a course at Langside College to prepare me for child care. I went to work in Stirling for a couple of years and this place is like a magnet and it draws you back to it. This is where I grew up and I had such a happy childhood here that I just wanted to come back and work here.

SAMANTHA: How did you find initially being a house parent?

HELEN: It was quite daunting, although I was in a way fortunate because the children that I got into care came straight from their own homes, they hadn't been in any other units within Quarriers. So they were fresh to the village. But...so I was quite fortunate that way.

SAMANTHA: Paint a picture for me.....what life was like than as a house parent....

HELEN: Initially I had a lot of young children, families with young children....like three, four, five, six, seven...that was the age...a lot in that age group. And it was hard because you didn't have things like washing machines or anything like that. You had a lot of hard work. That side of life you just got on with. The children themselves, they adapted very quickly to life in care. Some took longer than others, some dealt with it differently than others. But on the whole children learn a lot from each other and they soon picked up how to sort of behave and how to sit at the table and this sort of thing....they learned from each other. They were a happy group of children we had. And it was just like one dare I say it, one...most of the time...happy family. It had its ups and downs from the children, if they cried you had to be there for them, when they laughed you were there for them. It was just generally like a family.

SAMANTHA: What kinds of backgrounds did the children come from who came to your home?

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HELEN: Some came from quite horrific backgrounds. Others came from....maybe eviction cases. Whereas as now they could get help from Social Work departments. Children were taken from the parents if there was an eviction order put on....for non payment of rent or whatever reason. We weren't really told an awful lot about why the children were coming into care. Our job was mainly just to look after them when they came into care. But some I do remember being from quite horrific backgrounds.

SAMANTHA: Such as...

HELEN: Cruelty, neglect, children coming in suffering from malnutrition, just total neglect really, physical and emotional.

SAMANTHA: So they came with a lot of baggage.

HELEN: Oh yes, definitely. Every one of them came with baggage of a different sort. But they all had it with them and it was just trying to deal with them always as individuals.

SAMANTHA: How did John come into it...

HELEN: I was single when I became a house mother at first and John came on the scene in 1968, although I had known him for a number of years before that. He had actually been brought up in care in Quarriers and his house parents had emigrated to New Zealand and my parents were asked to provide a roof for him when he came home on leave from the Royal Air Force, and that was how I got to know him. But, we actually got together in 1968 and were married in 1969 and John had worked in the fire service out at Glasgow Airport when it had just opened in the 60s and he was asked to come in to Quarriers as the fire officer. So it really suited us quite nicely to have him work within the village in a job that he was trained to do and happy to do.

SAMANTHA: How did John take to becoming a house parent?

HELEN: He took to it like a duck to water. He was.... I think because he had lived here in the village and he had seen my parents as house parents, he had known big families of children within the village. He didn't really, it didn't bother him too much, he was quite happy. I found it harder to let the reigns go, as it were. I found that I wanted to do everything, it was my cottage, my children and I found it hard to let John come in and do little things like even bring the coal in for me, or put the

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milk can out late at night, things like that. But, gradually that became easier for us both.

SAMANTHA: Did you love the children?

HELEN: Oh yes, aha. Different degrees of love. I think some children are by nature more likeable than others so, therefore, but you try to spread your love around and we with fourteen children it wasn't easy to say that you loved them all equally. Some, I have to confess, some of the children would agree that that I maybe had my wee favourites and that was difficult to get over, because if they came in a very early age you couldn't help but just love them as almost babies. And the older ones coming in just....they were maybe just a little bit withdrawn from you, so it wasit took time to get to know them and to love them.

SAMANTHA: What was John's relationship like with the children?

HELEN: Well John washe was primarily the fire and safety officer within the village, that's what he was employed as. He was a house father secondary. But in saying that he was....would go out to his job in the morning and come home at lunch time, have his lunch, and...just like any father would do...come home in the evening, take the boys to football matches, he took the Boys Brigade within the village here. He would help with refereeing football matches and...just generally took the kids down to play tennis, rounder, or played with them, listened to their homework if he happened to be in at the time. But most of the time it was the assistant and I, he would help with dishes, he would just generally do what a father would do in the house....listen to their homework. At the weekends ...on wet weekends in the winter particularly we would get all the board games out and John would be down on his knees with the rest of us just playing with the children. So he was just very much a family man.

SAMANTHA: Did the children love you both back?

HELEN: Yes. I would say we felt they did.

HELEN: I would say yes we did feel that they loved us. We always got that feeling that they were reciprocating anything that we had given to them, as much as children do show their love for you. I don't think it's until they're older that ...any child realises just how much love their parent has given to them and they look back and say well maybe I could have loved them a wee bit more or maybe I could have been a better child for them, or whatever. So I think they were just normal children

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in so far as they would go in the huff, or they would come for a cuddle, or you know, just like any normal children. So yes, I think they looked on us as parents.

SAMANTHA: How did you and John discipline these children?

HELEN: Discipline with 14 children wasn't easy sometimes. Pocket sometimes would be decreased. Television programmes - if they were being particularly naughty and we knew that there was a special programme they wanted to see on television we'd say 'well sorry, you're not seeing it tonight, or kept in from going out to play. And that was more of a punishment to us than it was to the children because we had to stay in along with them. I confess that if a child was really naughty I would smack them but I think that was quite the norm in the 60s if a child misbehaved they got a smack bottom or whatever.

SAMANTHA: Did you ever beat any of the children?

HELEN: Never. No I did not beat children. As I said I smacked children, but I did not beat them?

SAMANTHA: Did you ever starve any of these children?

HELEN: Never. There was always plenty food in the house and the children were well fed.

SAMANTHA: Did you ever force feed any of these children?

HELEN: No. Force feeding by nature like holding a child down and force feeding them, never did I do that. I encouraged children to eat, particularly things like vegetables, which were in plentiful supply in Quarriers because we had our own gardens. We had our own egg farm. We had our own dairy farm. So there was always plenty produce, fresh produce and we were encouraged by the administrators of Quarriers to make sure that the children did eat vegetables, did eat fruit. So some of the children didn't like it and I think even today, I know with my own children and grandchildren there's certain vegetables that they just turn their nose up whether they've tasted them or not. And I think was the thing that a lot of children had never tasted fresh vegetables and it was our job to try and get them to...whether they liked them or not, but to try and taste vegetables to take a daily supply of some sort of vegetables.

SAMANTHA: You were accused of quite horrific cases of cruelty against these children.

HELEN: Yeh.

SAMANTHA: Did these allegations come as a shock to you?

HELEN: They came as a complete shock to me, yes. I was absolutely astounded when I heard what the girls had said about me. It was a total betrayal. I just felt betrayed because I had loved these girls, I had loved these families and been at their weddings. We had been involved in their lives even after they got married and with their own children who called John and I gran and grandpa. And we just found it totally unbelievable that they would choose to do this to us.

SAMANTHA: Did John have any favourites amongst the children?

HELEN:

So there was no real problem about that and nobody felt that he was being treated different from any of the other children. No, I wouldn't have said that he had any particular favourites. He just was happy with all the children that we had.

SAMANTHA: Were you ever concerned in any way about the way John behaved around the children?

HELEN: I never had any cause for concern as to John's whereabouts, I was never suspicious of his movements with the children. No I never had any doubts about John's behaviour towards anyone.

SAMANTHA:

HELEN:

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SAMANTHA: One of the other accusers ... James, what was he like in the house...

HELEN: James was fine. James came to us from another cottage where he had reputedly caused a little bit of a problem. But when we got to him we didn't read his records for a month after we got him. We thought he was such a nice little boy, like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, he was pleasant to speak to, he was well mannered. Just a nice wee boy and we couldn't understand why he had to be moved from this other house.

HELEN: When we first got James he came to us from another cottage and, because we liked him so much, we thought well we're not going to go on what someone else had said about him. We'll give him a clean sheet and just see how he goes. So after a month I read ... John and I read together the notes from the previous house parents and we could not believe that it was the same child that we were reading about, that we had standing in front of us. And we discovered what the problems were in his previous house. And we just said well you'll not have competition like that with us.

When we got James he came to us from another cottage and we didn't read his records because we wanted to not pre-judge him. We thought we'd give him a fresh start and just see how things went with him. because it wasn't really normal for me to get children in on their own at that age, the age of 12. So we couldn't believe when we actually read a month later that James had actually taken a knife to his house parent and caused absolutely havoc within the house. And I

discovered from having spoken to him and asked him 'why did you do these things?' and he said it was because he was jealous of the house parents' own children who happened to be the same age as him and this was something I could understand very, very clearly that some staff children, as they were known as, were treated differently from the cottage children, which is a ...it's easy for me to say that that they were treated differently because some house parents just thought well they're my children and I will treat them differently. And I found that hard to understand, because when my brother and I had been children in the cottage we weren't treated any differently. If there was a smack to be given we got it. So I could understand where David was coming from in that he couldn't cope with them having different meals than he was having, different bed times, just generally allowed to do things that he wasn't allowed to do and he found this hard to cope with. And my reaction to that was 'well you won't have that in this house, you're the oldest boy in the house and you'll be treated with that respect'. So we didn't have any problems with him.

SAMANTHA:



SAMANTHA: When you discovered that three of your children, effectively, had made allegations against John what happened, how did you hear about it?

SAMANTHA: John was accused of a number of sexual offences against both _____ and James, when you heard the details of what he was alleged to have done to these boys what went through your mind?

HELEN: I just couldn't believe that it was my husband they were talking about. I just couldn't imagine what they were saying that he had done that he could ever in his wildest dreams have thought up to do to anyone. He's a man that people have

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worked in the village here but we just couldn't understand that it now seemed to be
our turn to be targeted this way. So we found that hard to cope with. And every
day was a nightmare because you thought...you just woke up every day saying
'when are the police going to come to the door and start questioning, or whatever's
going to happen?' So that happened, John was accused and taken down and
questioned and charged: [REDACTED] And then a few months later just
completely out of the blue the police arrived at the door to take John down to the
station to question him and we couldn't think who it would be that would be
accusing him now [REDACTED]

.....a few months later we were absolutely shocked when the police came to the
door to take John down again to be charged with abuse

[REDACTED] And then I was taken down the
following day and charged [REDACTED] of physical abuse. That was just
a nightmare. Every morning waking up, not getting to sleep at night, just
constantly thinking why were they doing this to us, why? Because, to be honest we
really...we almost felt as though we had treated them as though they were our
own children and had loved them, loved them dearly, and stood up for them, were
there for them through thick and thin, were there for them when their own parents
weren't there for them. Not that we ever judge children on the fact that their own
parents were there for them...but we knew the state that some of these children
had come into care and how much they needed love. And I just felt that we had
given them the best of what we could...it may not have been as good as it should
have been, but I think as a parent we did give the best that we could do, and we
really felt that it was just a total betrayal from them all because we had loved them
so much. We had included them in so many areas of our life, even after we left the
cottage they still involved themselves with visiting us, with bringing their children to
us, with being at their weddings, and [REDACTED] there for every family occasion
that we had. Every Christmas, Easter, christenings, weddings as were a number
of the others. So....and we had visited some of them in their own homes. We
were invited for holidays with them up until a couple of months before they charged
us they were still inviting us to come for holidays. We found this totally bizarre that
we were being targeted for something that we know we did not do.

SAMANTHA: John was accused of a number of sexual offences against both
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always found very comfortable to be with. Young children have never felt intimidated by him. I know he's my husband and I love him dearly, but if I felt that he had done something I would have voiced my doubts. But I've never had any doubts as to John's total integrity and just his behaviour has never given me any cause to think that he would ever do anything like they had suggested they did.

SAMANTHA: Why do you believe these allegations were made?

HELEN: I cannot tell you. I have gone over and over it in my mind and believe you me I go over it every day in my mind trying to think what they're going to gain, if anything, from having made these accusations, whether it's financial gain, whether it's something.....a transfer of blame from something someone else has done to them and they just feel that they have to target someone. And there is a saying that you hurt the ones you love the most and I just don't know where they're coming from, why they've done this, particularly to John because he did love them as a father, he was never the type of man that was what you call a touchy feely guy, he never showed that he was in any way trying to touch up anyone, male or female. He was just an ordinary decent guy and I just can't think what they hope to gain from it other than financial, or whether it has gain from the time we left the cottage they felt very bitter towards us and that it's taken them all this time to get these feelings out that they really were angry with us for doing, because after all, they looked on us as their parents and we had walked out on them, in a manner of speaking. Maybe a vulnerable age when they were all sort of early teens or late primary into their early teens.

SAMANTHA: You talk about transfer of blame.... In his evidence to the court James said one of the reasons why the abuse may have started was because he had held a knife to your throat. Did that happen?

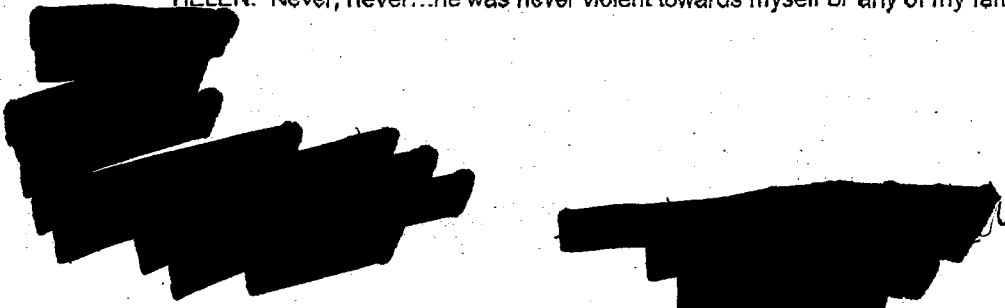
HELEN: No. That happened, not to me. It happened to the previous parent he had been with because that was why we got James.

SAMANTHA: And it states in James' records that this incident happened to the previous house parent...

HELEN: Yes it states in the records, the records that Quarriers have...

SAMANTHA: And at no point did James hold a knife to your throat?

HELEN: Never, never...he was never violent towards myself or any of my family.



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SAMANTHA: Why do you think he is transferring this blame, if you like, to you when in fact it was to a previous house parent?

HELEN: I think it's just his memory is just so mixed up about the whole thing that things did happen in his life even prior to coming into care, and that the man is just totally mixed up about who did what to him, and he just has to blame someone and perhaps because we were the last people that he was in care with he may have found it easier just to lay the blame at our door.

SAMANTHA: It's also alleged that he was beaten by John who was using a Boys Brigade belt. Did that happen?

HELEN: That never happened in our house. That again happened to him before he ever came into Quarriers. It happened to him when he was in foster care.

SAMANTHA: And is that in his records?

HELEN: I'm not sure if that's in his records, but that has been verified by one of his family members.

SAMANTHA: So it is known that James was beaten by somebody with a Boys Brigade belt but that indeed happened before he came to your house?

HELEN: Before he ever came to Quarriers.

SAMANTHA: So, again, this seems to be a memory problem.

HELEN: Yes, oh definitely there's a memory problem. But when he was giving his evidence he kept looking at me almost in search of answers or trying to get me to verify what he was saying. And I just couldn't. I mean obviously I couldn't speak anyway in court, but I just looked at him and I thought what are you about because you're totally mixed up in what you're saying, you're really laying the blame at our feet when we had nothing to do with any of this at all.

SAMANTHA: You were cleared of the abuse...

HELEN: Yes.

SAMANTHA: When you were cleared you must have just felt complete relief and joy....

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HELEN: Well I felt relief, obviously I was still very concerned about the accusations against John and that clouded really how I was feeling about my own acquittal. But yes I did feel relieved that I had been acquitted. I just thought well at least that part of it is ...that part is over for me. But how these people that have accused us are going to cope with what they've done.... I did worry about, because after all I couldn't give up the feeling that I had for these people. I found it very hard to be angry towards them. I was very hurt at how they had behaved. I just found it very difficult, but I was relieved when it was over for me.

SAMANTHA: When John was convicted, found guilty and sentenced to eight years, describe that moment for me in court.

HELEN: Oh that was just absolutely horrific. None of us there could believe what had happened. He was just in such a terrible state himself and the whole family were just absolutely gutted by it. I couldn't take it in. I just did not believe that a jury would listen to the rubbish that came out of these boys' mouths and that John would be convicted of it. And John himself....although I did tell John once or twice, trying to prepare him a little bit... 'if this goes badly for you you could go down for this' and his answer was always 'but why should I because I've done nothing wrong'. And that's just the way John looked at it. He could not believe that anybody would believe what these boys were saying about him. And most of all none of us....we were just in total shock, it took us a while to get over that initial shock. It's just been like a roller coaster because sometimes you think I'm beginning to cope with it a wee bit better and I do have a great faith, and I do believe that if John has to be where he is that he may be there for a purpose and our little grand-daughter has said 'papa's there as God's messenger' and I believe that she could be right that he's there to do some good. But in saying that, as a human being I've found it very hard to cope with why has this happened. Why has it happened to someone like John who, I know he was ...the Judge actually said 'you've presented yourself as a very respectable person, but behind that is a very sinister person'. I found that very, very hard to accept and that...we've shed a lot of tears over that because there's nothing sinister about John. He is a well respected person but he deserved any respect that he's had, and he certainly has never....he's always been up front about his life, he's never hidden anything. Honest John, I mean that's what he's always been known as, Honest John because he just has taken life as it's come and tried to treat people as fairly as he would liked to have been treated himself.

SAMANTHA: In the eyes of the law your husband is a convicted paedophile, that must be very difficult for you to come to terms with bearing in mind the love and time you put into those who accused him.

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HELEN: That is a very difficult thing to come to terms with becauseIn fact I just...probably for my own benefit I try to shy away from actually ever using these words. But I know that what you're saying is true that yes he was convicted. He certainly is not guilty although he may have been convicted in the eyes of the law and a jury, a majority of the jury found him guilty. I just find that so hard, hard to believe that anyone would ever think that of John. And I don't think any reasonable jury would have found him guilty.

SAMANTHA: What do you feel towards the people who have accused your husband?

HELEN: Well when I looked at them in the court, I just felt really, really betrayed and hurt by them. I looked at them....they didn'tsome of them didn't look over at me....some of them did. James looked over.

I just couldn't fathom it out at all and several times since then I've thought...now if I ever spoke to them again how would I react to them. I cannot hate them, it's not in my nature to hate people. I cannot hate them for what they've done. I know some of my family find it hard to accept and they find they maybe do feel hatred and they can't understand why I don't feel like that. but perhaps it's because to me they were....they're still part of the family that I looked after. and maybe I have to get beyond that now and have to say well they have done wrong and they have done wrong, they've done wrong by my husband, they've done wrong by all my family because it's not just John and I that are affected by this. The whole family - our daughters, our sons, our grandchildren are all affected by this and they have got to know what they've done. I think deep down they must know what they've done. But how do they deal with it. I don't know, Perhaps at some time in their life they'll come back to us and I don't know how I would welcome them..... my feelings are very mixed up. I feel just very, very hurt that so many people have been harassed, have been hurt, have been just upset by the whole thing. We have a great lot of friends and family who have been so supportive to us throughout this and we could not have been getting through it without the support.

SAMANTHA: What would you say to these people...

HELEN: Why? Why did you do that? What did you hope to gain from it? Did you really realise what you were getting into? It wasn't just accusing someone and walking away saying well, whatever happens I'm going to get something out of this

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whether it's financial or whether it's just the satisfaction of seeing someone put away in prison for a long period of his life. I don't know what I would say to them. I just think I would ask why and what did you hope to get out of it.

SAMANTHA: What has the effect been on your life and John's life ?

HELEN: Well physically it's not done me any good. I do have health problems which have been exaggerated by all this. Initially I found it hard to walk about the streets because there's always a niggly feeling. What's something thinking, do they think there's no smoke without fire. It's a horrible saying that, but people do use it and I have felt that. But then I began to think about it...well I've done nothing, why should I hide myself away. I have had to give up things in my life. I was the captain of our local Girls Brigade company. While I was under the court order while I was being questioned and before the acquittal I had to step back from that which had been a bit part of my life which was something I've always enjoyed doing. But I've had to step back from that and I found that very hard, as also the girls that I had in my company found that hard too because they and their parents have had great trust in me and I knew I hadn't betrayed their trust but there was always the feeling that well,...what do they think. And then.... I began to think about and thought well I had done nothing wrong, why should I hide away. I need to support my husband and I need the support of so many friends and family that I've just got to get on with my life, albeit at times I just sit down and have a weep about it all and just think how am I going to get through the next day, but then things come all right again and I start to cope. But it's not been easy.

SAMANTHA: It's so easy for some who had the care of children to be convicted for paedophile offences....

HELEN: I would never recommend.... And I mean this sincerely, I would never recommend people to go into the caring profession looking after children. You are so vulnerable, you put yourself at risk and that's a very sad thing in like because so many children need looked after. But who is going to take the risk now of children turning on them when things don't go the way they want them to or when they have had upsets in their life and they choose to do what the family that we had did to us, blame us for something that someone....perhaps someone else has done to them. That I would find very difficult to put other people into that position, and that is a very sad state that in this day and age when so many children are crying out for help. Young adults too who need the support of people, perhaps like ourselves who would be there for them. But I would not do it again. I would not encourage people to go into this kind of work at all. And I find that very sad. Because it was a way of life, it was a life that I enjoyed....

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SAMANTHA: This whole episode has left one thing - John in prison for eight years. Would you recommend that somebody goes and works in the profession.

HELEN: I would find it very difficult to recommend anyone to go into the child care profession now. You're wide open to accusations like my husband and I have had. John is now serving an eight year sentence as a convicted paedophile which I know he isn't and I just would not recommend anyone ever to do this kind of work. It's so difficult and I mean that....

HELEN: Nowadays it's so easy for people to be convicted of sexual offences. My husband's serving eight years for convictions of sexual abuse that he didn't commit.

Child care has always been a bit part of my life. It's been the main part of my life, a job I have loved but I would never recommend anyone to do this kind of work. My husband is now serving eight years for sexual offences which he did not commit and I just feel it's so wrong that people can get away, can walk away from historical abuse cases, they can make these accusations and have people convicted after so many years with no evidence and I just think it's so wrong and I wouldn't recommend anyone ever to do this kind of work.

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SAMANTHA: So that together with the fact that James has lied throughout his testimony in court and has problems with his memory and the fact that Janet has known to have lied in the past about similar incidents all lead you to believe that your husband is innocent.

HELEN: Definitely, my husband is innocent. I have no doubts in my mind at all.

SAMANTHA: He did not sexually abuse any of those children?

HELEN: He didn't sexually abuse any of them. He just didn't abuse children at all.

SAMANTHA: If you thought that John was guilty of sexually abusing these children what would you do?

HELEN: I'm not sure whether I would still support him. I think I would because I'm his wife, but I would not fight for him. I would not fight for his freedom because sexual abuse is one of the most horrendous criminal acts that there are and I certainly would not in anyway fight for his release not would any of the family be fighting for him.

HELEN: If I thought for one moment that John was guilty of sexual abusing any child I would most definitely not fight for him. No way. I would support him but I would not fight for him.

HELEN: If I thought for one moment that my husband has sexually abused any child I would not fight for him and I know that my family wouldn't fight either.

SAMANTHA: You'd be happier with him in prison.

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HELEN: I wouldn't be happy about him being in prison but we know that he would deserve to be there if he had done these things. But we know that he did not.

ENDS/