

"No More Silence" by David Whelan

The job of reviewing books about child abuse for a child abuse lawyer can be a bit like selling sand to the Arabs, in that it can become too much like a day's work in the office rather than a pleasurable read in my own time. My clients often want to tell their story, usually for unselfish reasons. The psychology of the process probably drives the victim to tell their story in order to embarrass the authorities, and draw attention to how appallingly they were treated, in the hope that no other poor child is put through the same grief ever again. Needless to say "No More Silence" did not fall into the same traps that other similar types of book can.

David tells us his life story over nearly 300 pages in paperback. Considering the many events which took place, the skill of the writing cannot be underestimated. We are taken along a journey from a neglected home life as one of five children in the desperately poor areas of Glasgow through a delightful foster home in the far flung Scottish island of Uist, to life as a waiter both in upper echelon hotels, to sea, back to London, then through the trial of his abuser. The main plank of the book revolves around the time he spent at "Quarriers", a self contained village for children in need of care a short distance from Glasgow.

The irony of the idyllic surroundings, with its own school, medical facilities, supermarket, church, fire brigade, and cottages where children lived, on the one hand, yet on the other hand abuse of a magnitude that is almost unimaginable, grabs the reader by the throat immediately. The almost pious nature of a seemingly Presbyterian Scottish community, is made all the more shameful, by the abuse which took place. David's abuser committed some of his offences, even more ironically, in the bell tower of the church at the centre of this Christian community – Mount Zion Church. David refers to him as the "beast". A more fitting title there could not be.

I read the book during my lunch hour over a few months. Not the most ideal way to engross yourself in the story line. It is a testament again to the writing that I was able to pick up immediately where I left off. Indeed once or twice I was late for work, as I could not wait to read another chapter. They are short yet absorbing.

I was apprehensive about the way in which the gritty details of the actual abuse would be handled. I need not have worried. Child Abuse is such a dark subject, that it can put off readers, because of the subject matter. I was assured by David in an email that the difficult bits were told sensitively, but without so much detail as to put the reader off. He was right. On the one hand the reader knows exactly what went on, but on the other hand we are spared the gory detail. To maintain this fine balance is incredibly difficult, yet David achieves it in spades.

I am not embarrassed to say that this book brought me to tears (not easy in a café) on three occasions. So moved was I that I immediately went back to the office and congratulated David on his achievement. The secret of surviving as an abuse lawyer

is to admit that the subject matter affects you, and not internalise your feelings. I am sure, however, that any reader will be moved by some of the things which happened.

The sections that brought a lump to your throat for me were not the abuse, but the emotional family reunions of children and carers that have been separated for many years then reunited. One of the happiest periods of David's childhood, was when he lived with a childless couple on the island of Uist beyond the shores of Scotland. He was cruelly separated from them, when his inept mother decided she wanted to try again. Years later he was then reunited with the help of his sister Jeanette. He describes the tears of joy when he met Morag again. Films can do this more easily, I think, than books, because the scene is graphically displayed in front of you. For a book to do this, speaks volumes for the subject matter, and writing style.

So why does this book grab your emotions so fully? First of all David Whelan is a rare breed – someone who, despite his neglected childhood, then abuse in institutional care, goes on to be a success. He initially works in prestigious hotels, then builds a successful business as a recruitment agent providing staff for some top flight events that he used to work at. Everything is going well until the abuser's wife contacts David many years after the abuse, to ask him to be a character witness for "the Beast" against whom there are many allegations of abuse. David's world crumbles, as he struggles to cope with the multitude of forgotten memories. He survives after the trial, and forms a support group for the victims of abuse at "Quarriers". One can empathise completely with his emotions, feelings, and admire the incredible journey he goes through. The story is almost circular.

The book sells through Amazon, which encourages reader's views online. This opinion is only mine, of course, but a real testament to what a wonderful book this is, can be found in the countless euphoric opinions you will find on the Amazon site, and indeed elsewhere. Does it avoid the fatal trap that books on abuse can fall into – self indulgent misery – absolutely. My advice as a child abuse lawyer – go out and buy it – NOW!

*Peter Garsden is President of the Association of Child Abuse Lawyers (www.childabuselawyers.com) and senior partner of Abney Garsden McDonald Solicitors (www.abneys.co.uk) of Cheadle Hulme in Cheshire. The firm has the only dedicated child abuse compensation department in the country (www.abuselaw.co.uk). They run several group actions, and have a legal aid franchise. In 2010 the firm were the winners of a Claims Technology award for most innovative use of Legal Software, Personal Injury Team of the Year at the Eclipse Personal Injury Awards, and Small Firm of the Year at the Manchester Legal Awards.
Email peter@abneys.co.uk.*