

Chapter One

A Mother's Story--Sexual Abuse and Incest are Perpetrated Anywhere, Anytime, and by Someone You Least Expect

The following is a dialog and thought process derived from a mother's true story:

"Mommy, can I take my panties off outside?" my 3½-year-old daughter, Cindy, asked as we walked across the street to our house; this followed her visit with her friend Gretchen.

My mind raced to what could have possibly prompted her to ask such a question. In spite of my fear, I calmly asked, "What were you playing?"

"Hide-and-seek, and Billy (Gretchen's brother, 13) was in the tree fort."

"Did your panties get wet?"

"No, Billy said, 'Take your panties off.'"

"Did you?"

"Gretchen took hers off."

"Did you take yours off?"

"No, Gretchen said it was OK."

When we got inside, I asked her to show me what Gretchen did, to make sure I understood. With that she pulled her panties down and "mooned" the air with a bare bottom. I did not expect this demonstration. This disturbed me.

"Did he touch you?"

"No," she responded.

Although he had not touched her, Billy had violated her and his sister. I would not have suspected this behavior, not from this family. These parents were pillars of the community and trusted neighbors, a college dean and a preschool administrator. My thoughts were racing--"How could this happen, their mother was home supervising the children playing?"

My mind darted back to a few weeks earlier, when Billy had stayed with my daughter while I ran errands. After questioning her, I was confident no violation occurred then. However, this "mooning" game, readily demonstrated by his sister, was an indication Gretchen had done it before and now she had encouraged and coached her playmate (my daughter) to do the same.

Feeling obligated to other children who played with Gretchen, I reported the incident to Child Protective Services and learned the violation with

Gretchen went beyond "mooning" Billy as he requested.

According to the current definition of sexual abuse and incest from E. Sue Blume's book, *Secret Survivors*, Billy was sexually violating both girls: "If it [the experience] is unwanted or inappropriate for her age or the relationship, it is abuse. If she is forced to see what she does not want to see that is abuse."

Unfortunately, Cindy's experience is more common than we could ever imagine. Further, the compulsion to act out sexual urges does not go away by itself. Therefore, without intervention, Billy would repeat this incident or he would escalate to more blatant sexual activity. Fortunately for Cindy, she could protect herself because she understood the "your body is yours" concept, which prompted her to question her conflict. Although Gretchen complied, through Cindy's belief that "the sanctity and control of your body are yours," she was able to resist and then clarify her experience. She was one of the lucky ones; her mother had taught, demonstrated and enforced concepts of self-protection.

To protect your child from sexual abuse you need to know:

1. What sexual abuse or incest is;
2. What to do;
3. How to teach your child self-protection.

