

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: fcdc@parliament.vic.gov.au
Date: 26/12/2012 08:50 PM
Subject: Clarification

Dear Janine,

I would kindly request that an amendment be made to my written submission, which was made on behalf of numerous victims of child sexual abuse within the Victorian Jewish community.

The amendment relates to the final sentence of paragraph 2.18i (*Moreover, Sheini New has been aware of the abuse for many years but has not addressed it in any public way—including apparently not assisting Police with their current investigation*).

Prior to making our submission we undertook steps to ensure the veracity of all its content. However, our efforts to verify Ms New's cooperation with the Police were unsuccessful; hence the decision to use the word 'apparently'.

I would kindly request that this sentence be deleted from the document as it has now come to my attention that Ms New has assisted the Police with their investigation.

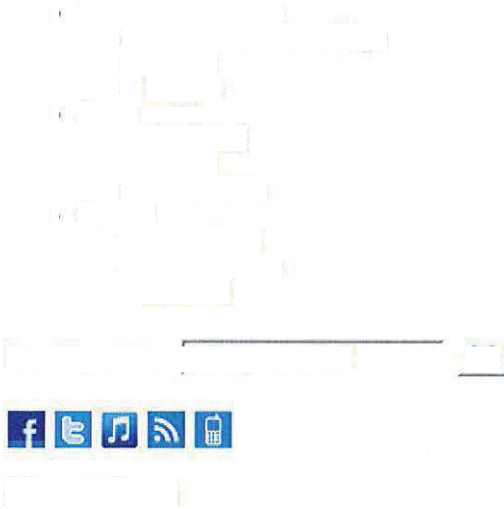
My apologies for any inconvenience but we would greatly appreciate this amendment be made at your earliest convenience.

On a completely separate note, the following is an article which will no doubt be of interest to you and the Committee. It is the most accurate and powerful article that I have read regarding the issue of child sexual abuse within the Orthodox Jewish community. Please see <http://forward.com/articles/168009/ub-u-sive/?p=all>.

Thanks again for your assistance.

Kind regards,

Manny



'Ub-u-sive'

Spelling Out Abuse After Nechemya Weberman's Conviction

By Judy Brown (Eishes Chayil)

Edited By Naomi Zeveloff

Published December 20, 2012, issue of [December 28, 2012](#).

Guilty on all 59 counts: guilty, guilty, guilty.

On Monday, December 10, a jury of 12 found Nechemya Weberman enormously guilty. The jurors convicted him of sexually abusing an underage girl entrusted to his care. They declared the respected member of the ultra-Orthodox community to be a criminal and a fraud, and thousands of survivors, advocates and victims, many of whom still live in silence, breathed a sigh of relief as one.

Once, an ultra-Orthodox man could not be found guilty of sexual abuse. He could not be charged with a word that did not exist.

I was 9 years old when I first encountered the word "abuse." I was at my friend's house. I found a book on a desk near her room, and ran to the staircase to read it. I don't remember the title, or what the book was about, only that across its white cover was a picture of a gun, and on the first page, in the subtitle, was an adjective I'd never seen.

I read it, slowly: "Ub-u-sive..."

My friend's mother came up the stairs just then, and when she saw me holding the book, she gasped. I wanted to ask her what ub-u-sive meant, but she grabbed the book right out of my hands and scolded me. She warned me never to take books without permission. Clasp the book firmly in her hand, she closed the door of her room behind her, and the book disappeared, hidden away, I suppose, in that mysterious, forbidden place where all books go that are not meant to be read.



It remains a vivid memory in my mind, the first of many similar episodes with books, magazines or pictures. Every incident reinforced the dominant ideology of the ultra-Orthodox world: More important than what you are allowed to know is what you are not allowed to know.

In the ultra-Orthodox world, words are important. Words are powerful; they give life to an image, reality to an idea. If you use only pure words, your mind cannot be tainted; bad words will leave a stain, marking you as less-than-good.

Abuse was not a word. If there was no such word, than there were no such children. And truly, for decades, there were none. They did not dare to exist.

When I was 9 years old, I heard a story. It was about a crazy lady who called the police. She told them crazy things about an uncle in the family. She had fabricated lies about him; she hated him, she wanted attention.

When I was 11 years old, a Bobov boy hung himself. He wasn't crazy, but something was a bit wrong with him. Mainly, he didn't have any friends in school. That's why he hung himself, everyone at school said.

Then in high school, 14-year-old Chavi was expelled from school. She had testified to the police that her father molested her after he demanded custody. My principal explained to me that she knew that Chavi wasn't lying, what she said was true. But her grandparents went against the will of the *rabbanim* and told her to talk to the police.

They had no choice, but to expel her, she said. Classmates were warned not to speak with her. We never saw her again.

Then, my friend told me her cousin touched her; he touched her a lot, she said. I didn't know what she meant, but one day she took me to a faraway place, far beneath the world I knew. She pulled me along with her, down long, dark corridors to a space I'd never seen before.

Few in the Orthodox community know of this place, where children live who do not really exist. Few in the community know of this world, where children go to die of forbidden wounds.

I did not want to be there. I could not bear to stay. I wanted to run away from my friend. I wanted to be part of the happy world, where people smile, and sing, and pray, where they do not bleed impurity. But my friend pulled me back. She said she was scared, so scared, and that I must stay with her, and I did, watching her curl up in agony, begging to die.

I did not dare tell anyone what I had seen. That would be the worst of all. You cannot wipe off the blood of a leper.

I never prayed for my friend, or the ones who dragged me there later on. I kept them a secret, even from God. Surely He would have nothing to do with such boys or girls. God is for pure intentions and thoughts; God is for the tragically ill. Abused children are an aberration, a mistake, and I was scared He'd view me as tainted, along with them.

In the insulated confines of my ultra-Orthodox community there are two worlds: the outer world and the underworld, and in between them a horrifying disconnect. We, of the underworld, are untouchable. If it is revealed that we are in any way tainted by abuse, even if only by association, it will defile our entire family; it will ruin their lives, their prospects at marriage. We are contaminated. And it is our job to protect the community from our contamination.

For many years we hid. We hid from our friends and from our family; we hid from our spouses, who did not want to know. We grew in silence, through adolescence, through the teenage years, through young adulthood and, for many, through arranged marriages. Then, slowly, as adults, we emerged, one victim, then another, some by accident, some by therapy, some by way of an outsider who taught them the words forbidden in their childhoods, words that described hell.

We began to speak. We used words like "abuse," "rape," "molestation" and "pain." We began to tell our stories to investigators, to journalists and on blogs. Some of us, for the first time, told our friends and our spouses.

The reaction was immediate. We were branded as tainted, damaged and dangerous, often by close friends and others. We were declared by leaders and respected rabbis to be "mosrim," traitors; deceptive liars. They called us self-hating Jews. They described us as young and shallow, rebellious men and women bent on vengeance and destruction; adults whose empty, worthless lives were filled with bitterness and rage.

We had violated the rules of what we were not allowed to know. We were using words that had been banned, forbidden. And we, who were stained with someone else's crimes, were ordered to disappear, to stop whining. For how could we claim trauma and pain when we did not really exist? How could we have witnessed crimes that our leaders, wiser and holier than we are, said were not there? Because there was only one truth in this world, that of the rabbis and the holy men — and it was only they who could decide what had happened and what had not.

In 2003 I began writing my novel, "Hush," a story of two ultra-Orthodox girls who endure the horrors of sexual abuse. People often asked me how I did it, how I wrote and published such a book while still living within the community.

I never answer their question. I have never been able to explain. It would take another book to do so. Because from the day I wrote until the day I finally ran away, I lived through the darkest parts of my world.

"The truth shall set you free," David Foster Wallace wrote in "Infinite Jest." "But not until it is finished with you."

Victims of sexual abuse, forced free by a horrific truth, live with gashlike scars across their souls. One scar from the crime,

the other from the denial that followed. They live with a constant question:

How?

How did this happen?

How did a community of values, of family, of God, become stripped of its own humanity? How did a group of people, warm and giving in so many ways, so viciously deny the suffering right in front of their eyes?

I don't know if we will ever find an answer. Yet if we look deep within our own mindset, perhaps we can better understand the complicated factors that have brought the community to where it is today: cover-up, abuse and scandal exploding in the daily news, like buried landmines in old battlefields.

The religious Jewish community is a closed world, one that has built high walls around itself, walls that ensure that the gentiles and their evil influences cannot infiltrate. Yet the religious Jewish community is also a giving world, one with countless chesed organizations, there to help ease the suffering within. It is a generous world so long as the suffering is of a certain kind, so long as it does not violate the rules of what can and cannot happen.

Chai Lifeline, Tomchei Shabbos, Bonei Olam, among others — these are all organizations that help the ill, the poor, the widows and the orphans to deal with misfortunes sent by heaven.

Heavenly tragedies are not in the community's control. They are there by a decree of the Almighty, a small part of a larger, divine story, just one piece of God's grand plan, one that we cannot hope to understand. We must accept it with simple faith.

Sexual abuse is not from heaven. Sexual abuse is an act of man. Sexual abuse is suffering brought upon a person by the twisted demons of another. It is part of a darkness we declared to be safely beyond our high walls.

It means that there are victims, and where there are victims there are villains. It means that there are scars, and where there are scars there are criminals.

The ultra-Orthodox community does not want to know its criminals. It does not want to see its villains. It chooses to hide the darkness, to fight like hell against those who try to show it. It chooses to ban the words that define the evil, to intimidate those who try to speak or understand it. This way the community continues to feel safe, to hold an image of itself as whole, unbroken, secure from the harm of suffering children.

It is deeply disturbing, seeing those scars, the part of the community that doesn't fit the traditional Jewish narrative. It is terrifying to look in the mirror and see a gentile's reflection; that was only supposed to belong to the goyim. The instinctive reaction is denial: This cannot be us. The instinctive reaction became community policy, and it is visceral, terrifying and cruel. Such children were called mentally unstable. It was better to be crazy than to be abused. Crazy was the child's fault, abused was the community's own.

And this is how the Orthodox Jewish community turned into a world that went to war with its own children.

The Orthodox Jews are not alone in this. Over the past decade, they have partnered with their historical enemies, the Catholics, to battle the grave threat posed by men and women scarred by the sins of their leaders. Among the Catholics, the lies and the scandals tore the forefront 10 years ago, opening the doors to thousands of other victims to come forward. A decade and billions of dollars in settlements later, the cases are ongoing.

For us Jews, the process toward justice has been much slower, with victims emerging from the shadows only recently. But a little more than three weeks ago, on November 26, a trial began on the 20th floor of a building in Downtown Brooklyn.

Tens of thousands watched — Orthodox, ultra-Orthodox, secular — following the story on blogs, Twitter and newspapers. Tens of thousands watched as, for the first time, an 18-year-old girl from a Hasidic enclave took the stand as a witness to her own hell. They watched the slight, just-married, slip of a girl say — and say again — that she'd been abused and molested repeatedly, and that what happened to her had a name, a label, a word. She existed. They watched the girl, not quite an adult, stand up to a community that refused to acknowledge an act of evil because doing so meant there was evil among that community, they who were inherently pure. '

On the December 10 the jury came out, and something changed in our world. Something happened to the long and paralyzing silence, frozen for decades with fear. It cracked open. It shattered with finality.

Guilty, guilty, guilty; 59 times guilty. The jury of 12 declared Nechemya Webberman to be a criminal, one who was

enormously guilty. And survivors, advocates and victims breathed in relief as one. Because we had long known that bricks and stones, traditions and ancient rules do not ensure morality, only a dangerous pretense of it. We have long known that the greatest enemies lie not behind the walls, but here, inside, deep within ourselves.

There are those in the ultra-Orthodox community who say that much has changed, that there is more awareness than before. They say that many schools have taken on the issue, bringing in experts and educating teachers about the symptoms and dangers of abuse; so why don't the survivors just shut up already? Why do they still demand attention and embarrass the community in the media? What more do they want?

For decades, victims of sexual abuse have had to pay dearly for the community's denial. Those victims are now grown. They speak out in different ways, and it is the community that now, too has to pay a price for its denial.

The community members don't get to choose the price. They don't get to decide what victims should do with the trauma they've created. After years of brutalized silence, victims will speak as loudly as they need to.

This is a community that wants to leave sin, so long as it can do so without expressing regret. It is willing to change the future, so long as we allow it to forget the past, so long as we don't ask it to account for its actions. It wants change, it really does, but the change is conditional: change on its own terms, change it can take credit for without ever looking back, change that is another form of denial.

One cannot ask forgiveness from the dead. It is too late to reach out to those who jumped off balconies, who hung themselves off bathroom rods. It is too late to turn to those who swallowed bottles of painkillers, who overdosed on drugs. Yet there are hundreds of survivors who still live, men and women who've stood up and walked on — once terrified children, now haunted adults, still gripped by a past that has ripped into their souls.

They are no longer seeking the truth; now they seek only honesty. They are no longer seeking holy men; now they seek only good men. What they want from those who have legislated spirituality, from those who've led the community down its darkest path, is the first step of repentance; a confession, an acknowledgement, a reckoning that in the hollowed halls and back rooms of homes and institutions built for God, a terrible thing has happened.

Perhaps there will be a day when a victim in Williamsburg or Lakewood can ask for justice without being forced out. Perhaps there will be a time when advocates and survivors will not be threatened, harassed and terrorized for demanding that the most basic of morals be upheld. Perhaps there will be a day when the community and its leaders will acknowledge the hell they've created for so many of their own. Maybe they will ask for forgiveness. And then we will know that change has truly come.

Until then, let us teach our children the words stolen from our generation, words that describe hell. Because for those of us who have survived, who have lived in the underworld and came out alive, we hold a sacred knowledge: Words are important. Words are powerful. A mind cannot be tainted by a word, only by its refusal to acknowledge it.

Judy Brown wrote the novel "Hush" under the pseudonym Eishes Chayil. "Inside Out" is her essay series about life in the ultra-Orthodox world. It is based on true events, but her characters' names and identities have been changed; some are composites, comprising several real-life people. Find her at Facebook.com/JudyBrownHush.