

# I Thought You Were A “Good Man”

By Jodie M. McNeil, Community Partner

In the words of actress Ashley Judd, in the movie, *Where the Heart Is*, she asks, “How do men like that find my kids?” “How did he know he could do such a thing to us?” “He was looking for women like me who are alone with children and women who are stupid.”

All she saw was a “Buick.” In my situation all I saw was a “good man” – a Youth Director, Music Minister. He participated in Christian retreats. He paid his child support and exercised visitation with his children. When we began dating he encouraged me to attend church with him. I had no reason to believe that he was anything but good.

When he proposed I saw the potential to start a new life for my three children and myself. From the start my daughter, a freshman in high school, and he did not get along. I chalked it up to her being a teenager. They argued about everything. He provoked her every chance he got. My son needed a father image and he was determined to make a “real man” out of him. He was very hard on my son and controlling. I did not see it clearly at the time. This man was not so “good” to my oldest daughter and son or to me but to my baby girl he was wonderful. He loved and spoiled her, he bought her little presents, gum, candy, ice cream. She was his Little Princess.

Little did I know that “spoiling” was actually “*grooming*.” Grooming is one of those dual meaning words I wish I had never had to hear. You see this good man was grooming, conditioning my five -year-old daughter to allow him to sexually molest her. By building her trust, love, and confidence, he was able to use her little innocent body to meet his emotional and sexual needs. She totally trusted him and did not understand that it was wrong.

I taught my children about the dangers of strangers. But that’s not enough. In all honesty the thought of explaining to my children that some people whom they love and trust may want to see, touch, or hurt the private areas of their bodies never crossed my mind. Fact is that one in four children is being victimized (*Pediatric Annual*, May, 1997). That’s about seven children in every classroom. Education is the best way to reduce your child’s risk of becoming a victim.

**Teaching your child not to talk to strangers is simply not adequate anymore.** Most children are molested by someone you trust. *Molesters don’t wear ugly masks. They wear a shield of trust.* From the outer appearance that person may appear good, but inside he/she could be totally corrupt. Knowledge is power. It’s never too early to have conversations with your child about appropriate and inappropriate touches, or as my three year old granddaughter calls it, her “privacy” areas. Educate yourself and your children so that they are not powerless at the hands of a perpetrator hiding behind the shield of trust.