

Name and Shame?

By Christine Mitchell



The brutalized body of Sarah Payne, an innocent eight year old girl lay in her little white coffin, a silver fairy on a silver chain around her neck, a gift from a stranger, received just as the search for Sarah began, wearing her favourite dress in a room bursting with roses, lilies and carnations. Her parents Sara and Michael sat just a foot away, holding hands in the candlelight, saying a tearful farewell to their precious princess.

Every parent's nightmare! Who could do such an evil act? Well; on this occasion Roy Whiting, 32, a mechanic, was convicted of this evil crime and was sentenced to life imprisonment by trial judge Mr Richard Curtis, after previously abducting and indecently assaulting another girl, aged nine. He was sentenced to four years in prison for that crime but served only two and half and then was released to strike again!



Little Sarah Payne was snatched as she played in a field in West Sussex in 2000. Her body was found sixteen days later in a shallow grave. Sarah's death shocked the nation and sparked the massive push for tougher control of paedophiles.

Bill Laws, News of the World editor, took a major step in August 2000; following Sarah Payne's murder; when he produced an article which revealed the names of well known paedophiles in 'our' home towns. The nation was shocked and argued whether this was right or wrong.

But who are we to 'name and shame' these people? Doesn't everyone deserve a second chance? I think not.

How can there be any justice in the world when no matter how serious the crime and how long the prison sentence; you are offered help, help to re-habilitate yourself, become a better person! What about the victims and their families, are they forgotten? They have to learn to adapt to life without their precious sons and daughters, so why don't paedophiles have to live with the consequences of what they have done! They have committed a serious crime, not only have they hurt the innocent children, but also their families. They should pay for it; they should be named and shamed. How would you feel if your next door neighbour was a paedophile?

What happens when we name these despicable people? Are we giving them the chance to hide away or will they be pointed at in the street, for everyone to be aware,

aware of the evil they have done? Who dictates whether we should name them? Who has the right to say?

Home Secretary David Blunkett has expressed support for tagging paedophiles in the past and is keen to test the new Global Positioning Systems (GPS) technology, in the hope that we don't need to name the paedophiles; as they will be able to detect where they are. Following the murder of Sarah Payne, Blunkett wrote: 'We are interested in tagging sex offenders released on supervision into the community, not least to ensure that they stick to the agreed location.'

The tag's appeal to police forces and probation services is obvious; Wansdyke's Labour MP Dan Norris agreed to be fitted with the tag for a week before reporting back to the party conference. "I want to test it to see what it's like on a day to day basis," he said. "Because paedophiles are, by definition, such devious people we do need to know that in the real world it can do what it claims to do."

Because GPS tracks where they go every day it would mean they wouldn't have to be picked up every time an offence is committed. Could this then deter paedophiles from committing their crimes through fear of being caught? Or does it just add to the excitement of being more of a challenge to these sick and disturbed people?

Civil liberty groups expressed deep concerns last month. 'If they have been released, they should be free to live their life in liberty. This muddies the waters between guilt and innocence,' said Mark Littlewood, campaigns director of Liberty. 'This is more likely to make them feel alienated. Once released, they should be made to feel a normal member of the community.' But why should they be allowed back in society, to live a 'normal' life? Tagging is likely to be greeted favourably by child protection campaigners who have long called for the obligatory tagging of paedophiles.

One issue that should be considered is this. . . if paedophiles commit a crime and serve their time, should they then be allowed to be 'free' to reunite with society and be given a second chance? What about the paedophiles that have been given a second chance, and then, re-offended? Should they then be given a third chance? For example Roy Whiting was giving a second chance with fatal consequences.

One case that is known to have infuriated British police is that of former Radio 1 DJ Chris Denning. The 59 year old was released from prison in the Czech Republic in 2001 after serving a three-year prison sentence for sexually abusing underage boys. The Home Office failed to extradite him for alleged offences connected with the case of the pop impresario Jonathan King. At first he was thought to have moved to Holland or Germany, but was tracked down to Slovakia by a tabloid newspaper earlier this year.

If all known paedophiles were named then situations like this could be prevented. The Czech Republic, and other countries, would have to disclose criminal records of anyone wishing to return to England, on this occasion we would have been aware of the situation and therefore been able to resolve it at the time.

In today's society, more than ever, this country needs SARAH'S LAW to give parents the legal right to know the identities of serious child sex offenders living within their

community. Again, I repeat, how would you feel if you lived next door to a paedophile?

Sarah Payne's parents Sara and Michael have sparked a huge campaign, together with the help of the News of the World. They have put together a website petition, (www.forsarah.com/html/signup.html) in the hope that our prayers will be answered. There are endless numbers of meetings with local MP's; letters that are sent regularly to Tony Blair and David Blunkett, agonizing over the right for Sarah's Law to be instated.

Children every day are disappearing, and parents hope that they will come back, alive at least. But the fact is that most don't. If we don't have the right to name and shame these known paedophiles, then we don't have the right to allow our children the freedom of being able to go out into the streets and play with their friends. What does this mean? Do we lock up our children? Or should we lock up the paedophiles?

This campaign represents a damaged child, a ruined life – or like Sarah Payne, eight and Milly Dowler, fifteen, a life lost.

People argue the fact that you can tell, know who's a paedophile and who isn't, I mean look at the picture of Roy Whiting, and yes I would agree too, he does look like a madman. But what about the rest of them, they don't have a sign explaining to innocent young children to keep away, do they?

People from all walks of life, professional, perhaps your own doctor, or the nice hairdresser that always greets your child and gives them a lolly pop, at the end of the haircut. The truth is we don't know. It is relatively rare for a paedophile to be a complete stranger to the family; paedophiles can be very good at making friends quickly and appear warm and approachable. They often come across as 'nice men or women' and this helps them to get close to parents and their children. They are attracted to places, jobs and activities which allow them easy access to children, like your local swimming baths, or maybe helping out in your child's school. Some paedophiles abuse their own children, step children, or other children within their own families. Most sexual abuse happens within the family home and is carried out by someone well known to the child.

Children can be so trusting, we teach them from an early age to respect their elders, we also teach them to be aware of strangers, but when this stranger becomes your friend then shouldn't your child listen to them?

Paedophiles prey on the most innocent and vulnerable children. Children who are already going through some kind of emotional stress; like being bullied at school or feeling like they don't belong because of some kind of disability, this is when the paedophiles strike, when the children are at their lowest. They become their friend, someone there to listen and take away their problems and as soon as they have the trust of the child, then

Some paedophiles don't plan in so much detail, or so we think. It would appear that some see a young girl playing happily and then decide on the spur of the moment that they want her. They grab her, beat her, sexually abuse her and kill her and then try to

hide the evidence. They then, perhaps go home to live their life as ‘normal’. While we, the parents are beside ourselves wondering what on earth has happened to our little girl, where could she be? The paedophile sits at home calmly drinking a cup of tea and enjoys relaxing in front of the television as though nothing has happened.

How can we then deny these parents the right to know? That ‘nice’ man that was talking to your daughter in the park, before she disappeared, was actually her killer. If only you knew, if only you were given the option to be allowed access to this information then this could have been prevented. Perhaps the paedophile would have thought twice, knowing that his name and picture was displayed for us to know what kind of a man he really was. Who would know what the outcome could have been?

Home office figures show us there are approximately 110,000 convicted paedophiles that live in Britain (experts would put the figure at more like 230,000) and only 5,000 are on the sex offender’s register. This means that 95,000 live in communities and we don’t have the right to know who or where they are.

News of the World reports Sarah Payne’s killer, paedophile Roy Whiting was allowed to live in a community totally unsupervised. The police knew where he was but he was not monitored, therefore he was able to strike again, this time with fatal consequences.

Plainly the current controls on paedophiles are not strong enough.

Below is a table indicating some of the crimes noted by the Home Office of sex offenders. Perhaps when you see how many innocent young children come to harm from these criminals, you might consider that many of these criminals had re-offended, and also think of the consequences if we were to name and shame these people; then possibly the numbers would decrease again.

Number of convictions or cautions in England & Wales for the six most common sexual offenses against children in 1985 and 1995: This information is to give you the number of innocent children that are assaulted compared to the number of stories we hear or read about; you can clearly see that, yes the number of crimes committed in 1985 was more than that of 1995, but still 3530 innocent children came to harm, we probably only heard about ten of those.

	1985	1995
Indecent assault on female <16	2416	2116
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl <16	1550	603
Indecent assault on male <16	674	476
Gross indecency with girls 14 or under	206	129
Unlawful sexual intercourse with <13	168	122
Gross indecency with boy 14 or under	122	84
Total	5136	3530

This includes rape of girls under sixteen, for which there were 118 convictions in 1995 but no comparable figures for 1985 when this offence was not recorded separately. Source: Home Office (1997).

The News of the World conducted a survey, with Sarah's Law in mind and asked the question 'Do you think people should know if there is a convicted paedophile in their neighbourhood?' They also asked the question 'Should convicted paedophiles be publicly named?'

It would appear that the majority of 'News of the World' readers would 'name and shame' convicted paedophiles in order to protect our children. Now we fight for justice and hope that Mr Blunkett will support us in this fight. What I find difficult to understand is why we wouldn't name these people who have committed a serious crime and should pay in every way, shape or form. They may decide to go into hiding, but; if we can tag these criminals then surely we know who they are and where they are. Could our children then play safely in the streets again? Who are we trying to protect, the identity of the paedophiles or our children?

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Words (2171)