

Reopening a wound called Fells Acres

To some, reopening the sensational Fells Acres Day Care child molestation case must be similar to opening up a very deep and old wound. And we hope our coverage of this amazing story isn't akin to rubbing salt in that wound.

The last thing anyone wants in reexamining this case is to cause further pain and harm to the children and their families who took the stand against the Amiraults.

But many of those who have taken the time to carefully review the evidence against the Amiraults have come to the conclusion that Tooky, his mother, Violet, and sister, Cheryl, may be innocent — or at the very least, may have been convicted without enough sound evidence.

There is enough evidence and hindsight now for state or federal officials to carefully review the Fells Acres investigation and subsequent prosecution. And we urge that they do so, now.

We don't believe there was a conspiracy. We don't question the motives or integrity of the state's prosecutors, many of whom have moved up the political ladder in the years following the case. It's just not that simple.

Before the mid-1980s most child molestation cases were low-profile; many were never reported to police or other authorities. These truly were the dark ages for abused children.

There are documented cases of school administrations in some cities passing on teachers who were accused of child molestation to other school districts, without saying a word. The idea was to get rid of the teacher, and if giving him or her a good recommendation for their next job would do it, then so be it.

It was in the backdrop of this debilitating silence that led many people to applaud the fierce prosecution of these cases in the mid-'80s. Finally, what was once a taboo subject could be brought out into the open, condemned and prosecuted.

Many of these cases had similar features because the method of operation for pedophiles follows a pattern. In many of these cases, where convictions were obtained, pornographic photos of victims were discovered, people who were molested years before the first victim came forward came out of the woodwork to say that they too were molested, and the accused often ended up admitting their guilt.

None of this happened in the Fells Acres case. The prosecution announced once during the trial that photographs were seized. However, it came out later that those photos contained only innocent shots of children at the day care center.

A check with police who worked on this case revealed that no older victims contacted police after the Fells Acres story broke. This leads us to ask, could Violet Amirault have turned into a pedophile at the age of 60? If so, this clearly goes against the norm of pedophiles who usually are found to have molested children for years before being caught.

And so far, neither Violet, Cheryl or Tooky have admitted their guilt. Several years ago, both Violet and Cheryl could have been released on parole if they admitted they were guilty, but both refused. All three family members remain in jail.

But some people may be outraged at the suggestion that the Amiraults are the victims here. What about the children who testified that they were molested?

Those who believe the Amiraults are innocent say that the techniques used in questioning these children were misleading

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and hell-bent on obtaining a charge of molestation.

A look at some of these interviews reveals adults who would not accept no for an answer. Even though a child consistently denies being molested many times, the one time the child says "yes" is taken as proof. And all of the crazy stories that the children told during these interviews — of things that clearly could not have happened, such as molestation by robots and the killing of animals in front of the entire student body and staff — are discarded.

A study in Canada showed that young children who are questioned in this way will make up stories. In fact, these interviewing methods are no longer used in molestation cases today.

Which leaves us with another question. Could the tales of being molested by the Amiraults also have been made up?

One thing is certain. If these tales of molestation never happened then the child victims didn't knowingly lie about these incidents. They must have believed they were molested and must have grown up believing this.

The pain inflicted on them and the Amiraults warrants the state's reexamination of this case.

As an editor at the Wall Street Journal who is convinced of the Amirault's innocence said, "The genie has been let out of the bottle." And state officials can't afford to ignore the possibility that innocent people are in jail and innocent children have been led to believe something horrible that may not be true.

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