

Laura Schubert Pearson: On a journey to empowerment and understanding
By Rita Swan

Like Laura Schubert, my husband and I suffered an injury from religious practices and filed a civil suit against the church and church actors. We know what it feels like to be in litigation for many years and finally to lose—to have the courts say that everything Christian Science practitioners did and said about our dying baby was an expression of their sincere religious belief and therefore not actionable or that holding an adolescent girl down on the floor for hours when she is screaming to be let go cannot be redressed by the courts because exorcism is a time-honored religious practice.

So, I felt a deep empathy for Laura and was very pleased when she agreed to talk with me by phone.

Her poise, wisdom and accomplishments startle the listener immediately. She has come so far from where she was a decade ago.

In 1996 and for years afterward, she suffered a personality disintegration after being subjected to exorcism at Pleasant Glade Assembly of God Church as Caroline Fraser has described. She attempted suicide once and mutilated herself with sharp items more than a hundred times. She had to be hospitalized three times for a total of 13 days. She dropped out of her senior year of high school after only one day. She was declared disabled by mental health professionals and began drawing disability payments from Social Security.



Laura's experience confused and frustrated all of her family because their whole lives had been built around the church. They felt betrayed and bewildered. Her brother Joey, who had been a straight A student, was so anxious about his sister that he wanted to be at home with her all the time.

Laura's father, Tom Schubert, was an ordained Assembly of God minister himself and explained to her that, according to their church doctrine, Christians could not be possessed by demons. He had to tell her that many times as she continued to hallucinate, but eventually she understood that she had been abused by adults at the church and there was no excuse for it.

Her family's extravagant, dependable support was the most significant factor in Laura's recovery. Both her parents were very nurturing. Tom assumed many of the burdens of the lawsuit they filed and buffered his daughter from some of the intrusiveness and emotional pain of tort litigation.

Laura became driven by a desire to “understand [her] predators.” She got an associate of arts degree in criminal justice and then a bachelor’s degree in human services from Mercy University in Georgia.

She works full-time as a direct-care counselor for children and teens at Harbour Psychiatric Hospital.

She is happily married and the mother of two girls and a boy.

Even though the Texas Supreme Court overturned the jury’s award to her, she found the lawsuit “empowering.” Nothing can change the fact that a jury of her peers said she had been wronged by the church and its agents.

Her ordeal compelled her father to a radical re-evaluation of his faith. He resigned his ordination and his church membership. He had to start over in a new career at age 45, but multiple spinal fractures and surgeries resulting from osteoporosis eventually forced him to leave his work as manager of an auto parts store and take Social Security disability.

He has used this time to earn two graduate degrees in counseling and a master’s degree in psychology from Jacksonville State University. He shares Laura’s passion to understand the psychology of human behavior and to help others suffering emotional trauma.

