

From The Times April 26, 2007

Grandmothers arrested over satanic sex abuse at school

Richard Owen in Rome

Three women teachers were among six people arrested yesterday accused of sedating and sexually abusing children as young as 3 at a school near Rome.

The teachers — two of whom are grandmothers who had taught at the school and at Sunday school for decades — are said to have part in the repeated abuse of 15 children aged 3 and 5 for a year, filming them in sexual acts with satanic overtones at the teachers' homes and in a wood.

The others arrested were a female caretaker, a former producer of children's programmes for the state television station RAI, and a local petrol pump attendant. The television producer is married to one of the arrested teachers.

The alleged abuse — in the town of Rignano Flaminio, 25 miles (40km) north of Rome — came to light when some of the children began describing their "games" to their parents. They drew pictures of a "man in black" who wore a hood and drank his own blood, and said they had played a game in which "a wolf chases a squirrel and eats it".

They were warned that if they told their parents about the "games", they would be "taken away from their mothers by devils". If the truth were to come out and they were asked who had taught them to perform sexual acts, they were to say "my father".

The parents also reported bruising and swelling around their children's genital areas and that they had returned home from school in a confused state. Police say that the children were given tranquillisers and told they were sweets.

The six face charges including kidnapping, indecently assaulting minors, obscene acts and group sexual assault. Police had to protect the teachers from angry parents as they were taken away, with one shouting: "May you rot in jail for ever."

Ottavio Coletta, the Mayor of Rignano Flaminio, said that the town of 8,000 people was enveloped in "a poisonous climate of hatred and vendetta", and Father Erri Rocchi, the parish priest, said he still believed the teachers were the victims of "malicious tongues". He said that the women were church-goers and taught at Sunday school.

Pasqualina Pellegrino, a former teacher at the school, also said she could swear on the innocence of the teachers and the caretaker. "I simply do not believe they could have done this," she said.

Some parents, however, complained that the mayor and the school authorities had initially failed to take their suspicions seriously, and the school had not suspended the teachers even after the inquiry began ten months ago. "They accused us of trying to ruin the lives of respectable people," one said.

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David Icke is right. Read his stuff. Be afraid, be very afraid.

Craig, Deefield Beach , Florida USA

Yes, George Bush sure does get a lot of press.

Sarah, Nottingham,

Paragraph two states that the teachers are "are said to have part in the repeated abuse of 15 children aged 3 and 5 for a year, filming them in sexual acts with satanic overtones at the teachers' homes and in a wood." In this case, "said to have " indicates that no one has actually seen these supposed films.

Liz, Sterling, US

congratulations to Benjamin Studtman for highlighting the hypocritical manner in which people view female paedophiles.

Karl, Worcs, England

I can't believe the lame gullibility and religious 'tunnel-vision' with which so many seem to believe that if a suspected child abuser was a churchgoer then surely there must be some mistake. ...As if churchgoing were equivalent with saintliness and infallibility, and as if it were impossible to abuse churchgoing as a form of cover. Well, it seems to work very 'successfully'!

Marco, bhm, uk

I had made a comment with a link but that was rejected. If you search the web for references to "false accusations satanic child abuse" you'll find a sad but rich history of hysteria and false abuse accusations. Groups of children, when pressed for incriminating testimony by adults, will tell ever increasingly bizarre stories and implicate more people. Hopefully the Italians and all of us can learn from our ancient and recent histories surrounding children's wild accusations.

Nick Alvarado, houston, tx

Having read the comments here just like to clarify a few points:

- in Italy, the persons suspected of an offence of this dimension are routinely arrested and placed in jail before they are questioned by the investigating magistrate. Whether they actually be charged or released depends on those interrogations.
- the petrol pump attendant is held to be the ringleader, teachers are primarily being investigated as to how the children could have been taken out of classes during school hours.
- 4-6 of the children at the school report the same story, have the same nightmares, draw similar depictions of the abuse they suffered and have suffered sexual abuse according to examining doctors.
- the Carabinieri have been investigating for months
- Satanism exists in Italy, maybe a reaction to Catholicism. At least what the practitioners call Satanism, really just sick murders and abuse. There are quite a few "Satanists" languishing in Italian jails, convicted in the last few years.

JohnW, Milan, Italy

Wow. First France has an incestuous child porn ring, then this Satanic Italian thing, much the same. This stuff is NOT making it into our national news in the States, at ALL; yet all our insane people get worldwide press. Interesting.

Fargo Johnfodder, Aubrey, OK

Gee this sounds familiar... McMartin Trail, United States 1980s. After 6 years and \$15 million dollars it all turned out to be unsubstantiated.

It did ruin the lives of respectable people. For the sake of the children, I hope this is the same thing.

Jason, Nashville, TN

Someone mentioned films, but although I read that these acts were filmed I do not read that anyone actually has the films. Unless there is actual evidence of this sort, let's not make up our minds based on descriptions or even "confessions". Yes, I remember the McMaster pre-school case, and there was also a similar case in Britain I believe, in which there were detailed confessions by people who were told over and over that they were guilty and had simply suppressed their memories of their crimes.

One doesn't have to be a Satanist to worship Satan. American Satanism is childish garbage, the real Satanists are people who believe in the image of Satan the ruler of evil which is taught by the more conservative parts of the Catholic and Protestant churches. But let's keep our minds open and be thankful we won't be on a jury.

Christopher Hobe Morrison, Middletown, Orange County, NY, USA

I know that sometimes stories sound as if they were made up, but this is far too outlandish for it to be completely false.

I do not think any parent, let alone a group of them, would prompt their kids to lie about this.

I am just stunned that anyone, let alone women who have kids & grandkids of their own would do such a thing. If there was ever a case for a modern day stoning, these people would be the prime candidates.

Olivia, Richmond, USA

Each case must surely be judged on its own merits.

I don't see how you can say that you do or don't believe this case just because in previous years there have been some 'spoof' cases.

If there were the slightest hint of this happening to either of my children I would want the fullest investigation, I think you would too.

Richard, London, UK

I am troubled by the responses that seem to indicate disbelief... Did you people read the second paragraph? This stuff was FILMED! It's kind of hard to argue your innocence when you made a freaking movie of what you did.

Dan, Seattle, US

Who reported the "Swollen and Bruised genitalia" The Parents or Doctor's? What Video? I never read anything about a video? It's wise to await ALL the facts before concluding anything!!!

John, Sydney, Australia

All I have to say is PROTECT the children. I don't give a rat's ass to what happens to anyone other than the child mentioned. Do any of you have a heart or do you just want to see our name on the internet?!?!?

Stacie, Ray, Ohio

Mary, paragraph Two...filming them in sexual acts with satanic overtones at the Teachers' Homes and Woods.

That sounds like they were filmed to me...Hmmm

Stacie, Ray, Ohio

Will the Roman Catholic Church ever learn. With all the press on the Priest abuse scandal, now this and the local Priest is backing the perpetrators up. Unbelievable that he does not believe the video

evidence.

MRev David Francis, Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada

Dear Phil,

Thank you for making those of us that are from the UK look like fools.

Regards,

Marcus

Marcus, Yorkshire, England

On the flip side, just because the McMartin case was false does not grant a pass to these folks in Italy. Since children are susceptible to fantasy, the Satanism ploy seems to fit. We will see what happens. The videos appear to supply the "smoking gun", though.

The Aardvark, Elkmont, AL

Hoax?? Children with bruised and swollen genitals?? Films of adults performing sexual acts on said children?? 'Tell them it was your Father...'

So these kids are doing it themselves are they?? It is precisely attitudes like this that expose our children to these beasts. Like membership of the church means that one is incapable of such acts. That one, two or ten of these incidents was a hoax does not mean that each and every one shouldn't be exhaustively investigated and NOT pre-judged. The church is hardly blameless in matters of child abuse worldwide.

Pu Li, Guangxi,

Quite frankly, I don't know how any teacher could get away with sexual abuse or any other kind of abuse during school hours. If it is true, I blame the administration equally for not supervising. In my school, there's not a free minute - it is constant work due to strict requirements and I have unexpected visitors (my bosses, colleagues, etc.) all the time. It seems like the schools aren't very focused and strict if there's enough free time for even the possibility to exist.

In addition, without all the details, I don't want to rush to a conclusion, except to say if they did it, they're evil, if not, it's a tragedy. It's a shame when someone is falsely accused.

Someone referred to video - did I miss where it said there was a video recording? I don't see that anywhere in the article.

Mary, New Jersey,

NZ had a very public incident from Christchurch in the South Island in the early 1990's. It ruined so many peoples lives and many of the children who were victims recanted up to 10 years later. In the UK children have been taken away from their families in some cases still to be returned when accusations of satanic child abuse were involved. It does happen, it does get covered up, people are damaged, but.....investigate, investigate, investigate, be totally transparent and don't base all information on so called "experts" many who are called into question years later! Avoid knee jerk reactions, it helps no-one in the long term.

Jo, Auckland, New Zealand

Well, from the comments on here, it appears that if you want to get away with molesting children, you just have to do all the things that were mentioned in the McMartin case!

People sure are quick to judge things that they have no knowledge of, aren't they? Sure, this could all be a bunch of b.s., but you have absolutely no way of knowing that. Innocent until proven guilty, I say, but I certainly wouldn't be defending a bunch of people accused of the rape of 3, 4 and 5 year old children unless I *knew* they were innocent. And when I say "know," I mean have enough knowledge of the facts of the case to be able to form a conclusion.

Chris, Riverside, CA

Dear Americans,

a) since when was wikipedia a reliable source of information?

b) i doubt that children as young as three are in a position to dream up such horrific 'games' all by themselves..

Phil, Manchester, UK

If the offenders had been men, then 4/5 of the comments would have been screaming for castration, not rushing to defend and explain away.

I find the line "tell them your father did it" particularly telling.

Why rush to excuse those who would blame our entire gender for their own personal evil? Doesn't society have enough of these sorts of persons already?

Benjamin Studtmann, Olympia, WA

If investigated properly and carefully this will be found to be utter nonsense. Let's hope that the truth is found before these innocent people are railroaded and ruined.

Peter G, Venice, FL

Film or video evidence does not lie. "Good church-going women shouldn't be accused", yet they are on film! The priest scandals are not all lying malcontents, the priests abused children for hundreds if not thousands of years. I come from the city of Dennis Rader - BTK. He was the president of his church, the most upstanding of citizens, yet he took one of his dead victims to his church and photographed her in sadistic pornographic positions all around the church. You can hide alot behind religion. You cannot lie about videotaping raping drugged 3 year olds. This is not the same as the CA case and the witch hunts and people leading them to say things that are not documented by the abusers themselves.

George Sanders, Wichita, Kansas

Before everyone starts believing all of the allegations, please read about similar cases:

- the Kern County, California child molestation cases of 1983 and 1986
- the McMartin preschool case of 1983

Wikipedia lists several cases that sound similar to this one.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satanic_ritual_abuse

Until better evidence comes out, don't be quick to jump on this. The devil is in the details (sorry about the pun).

Greg, Chicago,

Um...these idiots need to read up on history. There's was this little case called "The McMartin Preschool Trial" that sounds almost EXACTLY like

this. I mean, reading this is almost verbatim what the McMartins were being accused of.

Read up on it.

Kevin, Chicago, Illinois

The satanic overtone may be the media or such this is close to Rome and most people over there are Catholic and want to believe or blame everything on Satanism. If you have ever read the Satanic Bible by Anton Lavey you would realize that it has everything to do with being your own God. Nothing to do with sick stuff like this.

Chris, Texas, USA

These "cases" were common in the US for about a decade. They were all frauds which did incredible damage to schools and teachers. Check the internet for the "McMartin" case in California.

B.W., Washington, DC

I am instantly reminded of the book "Michelle Remembers." It was a total hoax that set off a period in America known as The Satanic Panic, where every parent was certain that Satanists lurked around every corner, and one could always count on torrid tales of Satanic rituals on Sally Jesse Raphael or Geraldo.

Radar, Fort Collins, Colorado

Do not rush to judgment. In America, we learned our lesson belatedly - many innocent lives were ruined. Google "Little Rascals Daycare" or "McMartin Preschool" for examples. The interview techniques used by the investigators (and not discussed in this article) are by far the most significant variable. Suggestive techniques used to "help the children tell their stories" resulted in the unfortunate abuses of justice we witnessed in the U.S. Beware of anyone who makes blanket statements like, "believe the children" or "children don't lie." They can and they do. They also can and do tell the truth. It depends on the child and the occasion. Demand a proper investigation and wait for the facts to come to light - not just the allegations.

Jim R., Greenville, North Carolina

We went through something like this in the United States in the 1980s. None of it turned out to be true whatsoever. I doubt very much these charges are true, based on the experience in America. Child molesters certainly do work in schools, but the added element of "satanism" makes the entire set of charges highly suspect.

Shawn, Andover, MA

If you're a child molester, school seems like the best place to work, doesn't it? Like the wolf working as a sheepdog. Oh Aesop, where are you when we need you?

Eugene, Heidelberg, Germany