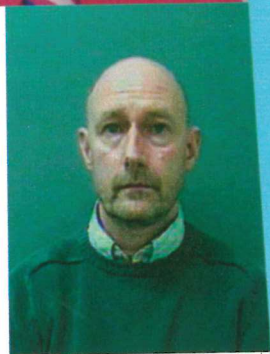




RAPE HELL RISE SHOCK

Top prosecutor defends celebrity sex charges

Left: Rachel aged 14. Teacher Graham Wilcock (below left) calculatingly preyed on her when she was at her most vulnerable, following the death of her father



'Of course I don't recall the colour of the wallpaper, but I remember the exact details of what he did to me'

their attacker brought to justice.

I have been through the agony of hiding my abuse from family and friends, and the anguish of finally finding the courage to report it. And I've gone through the pain of a court case. So anyone who thinks women would willingly put themselves through that for financial gain or any reason other than justice is mistaken.

My ordeal started in 1984. Mr Wilcock, who taught RE, was popular with pupils and parents. Yet one day, as I turned to leave his office, he asked me for a kiss. I thought he just wanted a friendly peck on the cheek, but as I leaned forward, he kissed me full on the lips and said, 'You really don't know how to kiss, do you? We're going to have to teach you.'

It may sound weird, but I was flattered, even though I knew what he was doing was wrong. Following the death of my father, I was so vulnerable and desperate for affection that I went along with it. Over the next three years, he abused me at his home, on the seafront and on waste ground. It never occurred to me to tell anyone because Wilcock, who was married, warned me we'd both be in huge trouble. The abuse ended when I moved to another school at 16. I began going out with a boy my own age and tried to put my 'relationship' with Wilcock behind me. After A levels, I went to Oxford to study English, then moved to London, where I became a correspondent for GMTV.

It took me more than 10 years to consider that what happened was abuse and not just a secret affair. Around 1998, rumours surfaced about Wilcock and other young girls. It was my wake-up call. I realised I was not 'special': this was not one-off behaviour. He was a paedophile. The first person I told was my mum. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done. I can still see the look of utter horror on her face. I then reported him to the school and, after an internal investigation, he admitted what had happened and was sacked. The school asked if I wanted them to notify the police but I was too drained. And even after he lost his

job, there was still this nagging doubt inside me that the whole thing had been my fault.

Then, in 2009, I heard a deeply disturbing story about him from an old friend that was the push I needed to go to the police. They took my accusations seriously because he had previously admitted what had happened. But they did say if he decided to change his mind and deny my allegations, any subsequent court case would be emotionally traumatic.

They were right – the whole experience was horrific. Because, although the police treated me with total respect, I still had to give video evidence about what I'd endured. I was asked the most graphic, detailed questions about every sexual act that had occurred. Mercifully, I was spared having to give evidence to a jury because Wilcock, who was by now divorced, pleaded guilty to six counts of indecent assault. I did, however, sit and listen to the CPS lawyer read the graphic details from my video evidence and impact statement in front of my family in court. I will never forget my mum's face or the way she gripped my hand tightly throughout the hearing.

He was sentenced to four years' jail – the maximum allowed at the time the abuse took place – and put on the sex offenders' register for life. I was fortunate because Wilcock pleaded guilty, so I was spared having my life forensically ripped apart. Women who have to go through a jury trial know they will have to face all this, and their courage is incredible. Although sexual abuse victims can't be named publicly, they still have to give evidence, knowing that family, friends and often the media will hear everything in court.

Since I first spoke out publicly last year, I've been contacted by 20 women who were abused or raped in childhood. With one exception, none has taken their abuser to court. These women were attacked by cousins, uncles, brothers and neighbours. Many are suicidal; taking antidepressants; suffer flashbacks; have eating disorders or self-harm. They often blame themselves, often too ashamed to tell their families and fearful no one would believe them.

Of course I can't remember the colour of Wilcock's underpants or the wallpaper in the room where he used to make me lie naked. But I do remember the *exact* details of what he did to me. They'll be forever etched on my brain.

Because of the appalling hype surrounding the Savile case, the women who contacted me will never go to the police. They know their abusers are unlikely to be found guilty and they will have been called an 'attention seeker', 'fantasist' or 'money grabber' for nothing. When all they wanted was justice. ■
Rachel is a trustee of Revival, a rape and sexual abuse charity. For support, visit thesurvivorstrust.org