

Internet sex predator finishes prison sentence

Michele Mandel QMI Agency

Thursday, March 10, 2011 10:36:16 EST PM

TORONTO - After serving every day of his three-year sentence, one of Canada's most prolific Internet sex predators will be a free man today.

Mark Gary Bedford, 26, is scheduled to be released from the federal pen right back to his parents' Kingston home - where the cunning loner spent hours on his computer in the basement, luring and then blackmailing more than 40 young girls around the world into performing sexual acts for his perverse enjoyment.

Considered too high risk to be released early on parole, the con man has now completed the sentence he won in a plea deal.

"We bring him to the doors of the court. It's then up to the judicial process. But, no, I'm not happy," admitted Det.-Insp. Scott Naylor, unit manager of the Ontario Provincial Police child sexual exploitation section.

"If he has the potential and mindset to do it once, he has the potential and mindset to do it again."

Yet there is nothing they can do. The registered sex offender has done his time.

He was their puppeteer, he was their slave driver.

The boyishly handsome, former computer science student at St. Lawrence College used a diabolical scheme to entrap innocent young girls - one as young as eight - into performing degrading sexual acts in front of their webcams.

By impersonating a young girl, the pedophile went on chat rooms and struck up innocuous conversations that would offer him clues to their passwords.

He'd then hack into their accounts, assume their identity and troll through their contact lists for his victims.

He would trick the girl's friends into doing something embarrassing on their webcam - flashing their breasts was a common one - and then he would snap the compromising image.

Now they were trapped.

He'd then reveal himself as a man and blackmail them into doing his bidding on camera with threats of harming their families or e-mailing the photos to their parents and teachers.

From September 2005 to April 2006, Bedford stage-managed his own child pornography by preying on girls in Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia and as far as Kent, England.

Even as they'd beg him to leave them alone, his demands would escalate.

"They were very, very explicit acts," says the OPP investigator.

"It was horrific stuff, to look at the fear in their eyes knowing they're being directed to do things they shouldn't. Watching their hopelessness and their helplessness, I can still remember it like yesterday."

The only saving grace is that he apparently didn't trade their photos and videos with other child pornographers.

It was two young Edmonton teens who finally went to police and helped crack the case.

In July 2006, an international investigation led authorities to one lone man living out his sick fantasies in his parents' Kingston basement.

With charges against him climbing to 72 counts and with victims living thousands of miles apart, the Crown feared a trial would tie up the courts for two years.

So he and Bedford's defence attorney struck a deal: The pedophile was given a three-year sentence and prohibited for life from communicating online with anyone under the age of 14 after he agreed to plead guilty to 10 crimes - all but one involving multiple victims - including online luring, fraudulent impersonation, several child pornography offences, two charges of extortion and criminal harassment.

Ontario Court Justice Judith Beaman agreed to the deal - even though a fellow judge in Alberta had sentenced a far less prolific online predator to nine years in prison.

"He's a dangerous dude," warns Naylor, the case manager on the investigation.

"Mr. Bedford didn't think he did anything wrong, that's what was most disturbing, and there's more than 40 girls around the world absolutely devastated by this young man."

One teen told court in her victim impact statement that she's since dropped out of school and tried to commit suicide several times.

"There are young victims who will carry this for a lifetime," Naylor said. "Mr. Bedford does three years and he's out walking the streets."

michele.mandel@sunmedia.ca