

U.S.

Jury Finds Televangelist Jan Crouch Shunned Granddaughter's Report of Rape

By MATT STEVENS JUNE 7, 2017

Carra Crouch was only 13 when she boarded a private plane for a trip to Georgia. The few days she would spend there in April 2006 were among the most important of the year for her famous family.

Ms. Crouch's grandparents, Paul and Janice, had amassed a fortune preaching the "gospel of prosperity" to millions of viewers around the world. Their pulpit? A behemoth broadcasting network that the couple had built before Carra was born.

Ms. Crouch was to be a guest at a telethon for the Trinity Broadcasting Network. But according to a lawsuit she filed against the network, her trip quickly took a dark turn. The teenager was molested and raped in her hotel room by a 30-year-old network employee, according to the suit. And when she later told her grandmother what had happened, Ms. Crouch claimed, the congenial co-host of "Praise the Lord" screamed at her and blamed her for the sexual assault.

On Monday, a jury in Orange County, Calif., found after a monthlong trial that Jan Crouch's handling of the ordeal amounted to "outrageous" conduct that had caused her granddaughter to suffer "severe emotional distress." They awarded Carra Crouch, now 24, \$2 million in damages for past and future "mental suffering."

Jan Crouch died in 2016. But jurors found that the former network vice president

Christian Center of Santa Ana Inc. — is liable for its co-founder’s share of the damages. Exactly how much the network will have to pay is still being debated.

The jury did not find, however, that the elder Crouch, an ordained minister, was acting as a “Trinity Clergy Member,” at the time of the conversation. Had she been acting in such a capacity, she would have been required by law to tell the authorities if she suspected that a sexual assault had occurred — and been liable for other damages had she failed to do so.

“I think the jury got it exactly right,” said David R. Keesling, a lawyer for Carra Crouch. Jan Crouch’s behavior was “so abhorrent,” he added, “it’s hard to believe a jury would find that to be something a minister would do.”

Michael J. King, a lawyer for Trinity Broadcasting Network, said he and his team were “disappointed” that the jury awarded damages “based on a grandmother’s conversation with her granddaughter,” but pleased that the jury did not find that the grandmother had been acting as a minister at the time.

Judge Peter J. Wilson of Orange County Superior Court is expected to enter a judgment on the jury verdict next week, Mr. King said, adding that he and his team will decide at that time whether to appeal.

“Jan is dead. She did not have a chance to go to trial,” Mr. King said. “She never wavered in her love for her granddaughter.

“Her position was always that she was never given any information that there was an assault,” he said.

The jury’s verdict further tarnishes the legacy of Jan Crouch, whose television empire became entangled in legal acrimony near the end of her life.

Jan Crouch and her husband, Paul, began their network as a single station in 1973. But soon, Mr. Crouch invested in satellite distribution, building the foundation for what is now billed as the world’s largest Christian television network.

cash flow, and soon, the nonprofit organization's spending habits came under scrutiny.

The Crouches were specifically criticized for their lavish lifestyle. At one point, the pair had his-and-her mansions one street apart in an upscale, gated slice of Southern California. And some puzzled over the network's \$37 million purchase of a religious theme park, which Jan Crouch ran as a side business.

The most recent report available through Guidestar lists Trinity Broadcast Network as having more than 600 employees and \$760 million in assets, but operating at a net loss of more than \$9 million in 2015.

Paul Crouch died in 2013; Paul and Jan's son Matthew now heads the broadcast network, Mr. King said.

Carra Crouch filed her lawsuit in 2012, around the same time another of Jan Crouch's granddaughters sued the network, alleging that it was misusing donors' money. The network has since filed multiple lawsuits against that granddaughter.

In Carra Crouch's complaint, her lawyers claimed that a network employee "coerced" himself into the teenager's hotel room, had her drink alcohol and "began to touch" her "in a sexual manner," advances the teenager tried to fight off until she became unconscious, the court documents said.

When Carra Crouch awoke the next morning, the man was lying next to her and she had "severe pain and soreness in her body in places that indicated she had been molested and raped," the documents said. She locked herself in a bathroom and demanded that the man leave, which he eventually did, the documents said.

But later, when Carra Crouch told her grandmother of the episode, "Jan became furious," "began screaming" at her, and "began telling her, 'It is your fault,'" the documents said.

The male employee was subsequently fired but never arrested or charged by the authorities. In court documents, lawyers for Ms. Crouch said that the network had

organization was simply doing as the teenager's mother had asked: Officials fired the man and did not involve or connect Carra Crouch to the termination.

After the verdict was read on Monday, Carra Crouch told *The Orange County Register* she was still in the process of healing spiritually.

"I do have a relationship with God, but it took me a long time to get there," she told the newspaper. "I grew up with some pretty bad people, who were the complete opposite of what you would expect from Christian people.

"I was atheist until I was 21," she added, "but not anymore."

Correction: June 7, 2017

An earlier version of the headline with this article misspelled the surname of the co-founder of the Trinity Broadcasting Network. She was Jan Crouch, not Couch.

Alain Delaqu erie and Jack Begg contributed research.

A version of this article appears in print on June 8, 2017, on Page A22 of the New York edition with the headline: \$2 Million Award in a Lawsuit Dims Legacy of a Trinity Network Founder.

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