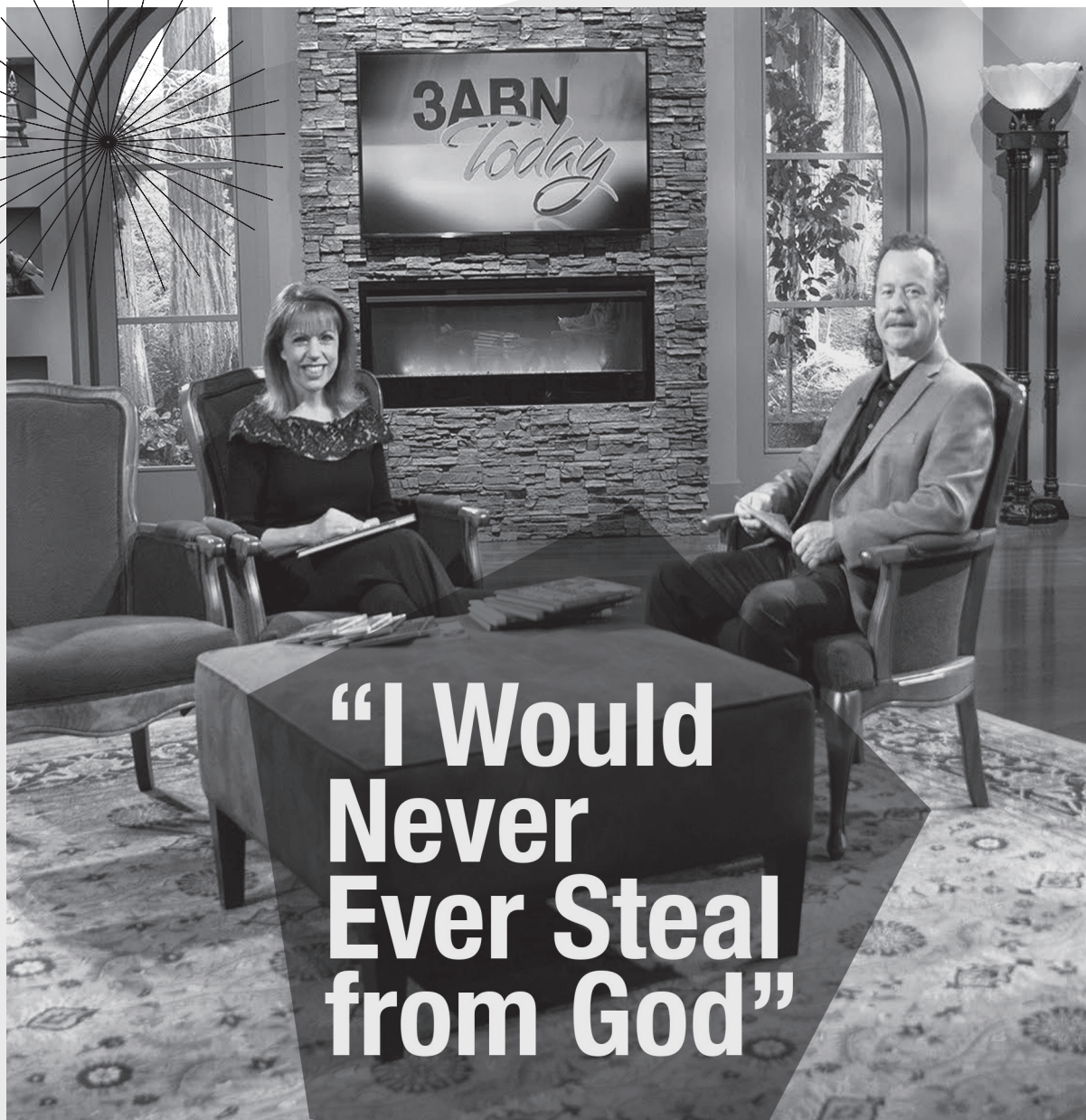


IN-DEPTH



**“I Would
Never
Ever Steal
from God”**

Brenda Walsh and Danny Shelton appear on a *3ABN Today* program announcing the release of *Miss Brenda's Bedtime Stories* (Photo courtesy of Brenda Walsh).

3ABN AND BRENDA WALSH SPLIT OVER PROPOSED STUDIO FOR CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

BY ALVA JAMES-JOHNSON

On April 11, 2013, when Brenda Walsh was still the popular *Kids Time* producer and host on Three Angels Broadcasting Network (3ABN), she appeared on a *Thursday Night Live* program with then-3ABN president, Jim Gilley, and founder Danny Shelton. During a two-hour interview, the men praised Walsh and her two sisters (collectively known as “the Micheff Sisters”) for their nearly two decades of volunteer service producing children’s programming, cooking shows, and music for the religious network.

As Shelton’s childhood friends, the three women had been with 3ABN from its early years. Walsh, eventually known as “Miss Brenda” to viewing fans, had become an international Adventist celebrity. In addition to her ministry on 3ABN, she had authored several books and produced daily devotions, traveling around the world as a guest speaker.

While reflecting on her popularity among 3ABN viewers that Thursday evening, Walsh, Gilley, and Shelton gushed over her new role as general manager of the recently formed 3ABN Kids Network, launched to produce 24/7 children’s programming. And, as Walsh spoke profusely of 3ABN’s plans for a new children’s production studio in Collegedale, Tennessee, the two men helped promote the project, soliciting donations and prayers from the viewing audience.

Now, six years later, Walsh and her *Kids Time* programs no longer exist on 3ABN. Instead, the former television host remains embroiled in a bitter dispute with the 3ABN executive team over funds raised for the Collegedale project, which 3ABN has since abandoned.

Walsh, meanwhile, has established her own nonprofit organization called Brenda Walsh Ministries and is moving forward with plans for a children’s studio and leadership center in Collegedale. Both Walsh and 3ABN have sent separate letters to donors regarding funds donated specifically for the Collegedale project. Most recently, on September 19, 3ABN’s Board of Directors sent out a letter reversing what they had told donors in a January letter that gave donors the following options:

1. I want my donation to remain at 3ABN for the purpose of producing children’s programming.

2. I want my donation to go to Brenda Walsh Ministries, for the purpose of establishing a proposed new children’s studio in the Collegedale, TN area.

In that first letter, dated January 1 and post-marked January 11, donors were given until January 21 to respond, and told if they did not reply by the deadline, 3ABN would assume “that you prefer your money to stay with the ministry of 3ABN for children’s programming.”

Walsh estimates that there is between \$1 million and \$2 million in donations that were designated for the children’s studio, and at one point 3ABN included a figure of \$800,000 in negotiations with Walsh. But no money has been forthcoming from 3ABN, according to Walsh.

On September 19, 2019, 3ABN sent a second letter to donors. This time 3ABN wrote, “our attorneys analyzed BWM’s (Brenda Walsh Ministries) request that we send your donations directly to BWM, and have since advised us that the proper legal approach to honor your intent is for us to return your donations directly to you, instead of sending them to BWM.”

However, this approach has tax consequences for the donors who had taken tax deductions for these gifts in past years, according to the letter. So, the new option presented to donors in the September 3ABN letter included having them take on that liability. They were given two options:

___Yes, please return my donation to me. I understand that there may be tax consequences for taking receipt of these funds, and I agree to be responsible for any such liability. Upon taking receipt of these funds, I release 3ABN from any claims that may arise from this donation.

___No, please do not send my donation back to me. I prefer my donation to stay with 3ABN and I am providing my consent for 3ABN to use my donation for the purpose of producing children’s programming at 3ABN. By providing this consent, I confirm that my donor intent is for the money to be used by 3ABN and I, further, release

3ABN from any claims to these funds.

This time, donors were given sixty days to respond, but told 3ABN would only take action if the donor responded. In both letters, 3ABN acknowledges that it will be keeping money that had been designated for the Collegedale studio and instead using it for programming.

The Bitter Dispute

The conflict between Walsh and 3ABN first escalated in public view, with videos circulated via social media and statements made at church gatherings. At the center of the firestorm is a video that the network released on February 27, 2019, insinuating that Walsh mishandled funds while in Australia raising money for the proposed Collegedale project. The video, which appeared on 3ABN's Facebook page and YouTube channel, went viral around the world, unleashing a social-media backlash from Walsh supporters and others who considered it an unfair attack on her character.

3ABN removed the video from the Internet within forty-eight hours. Shortly thereafter, a "Supporters of Brenda Walsh" page surfaced on Facebook, with posts criticizing 3ABN's handling of the situation. The page currently has 658 followers.

After removing the video from the Internet, 3ABN posted an announcement on its website, stating:

Due to the many accusations Brenda Walsh has been making against this ministry, 3ABN chose to post a video answering some of the questions that have been asked pertaining to the separation of Brenda Walsh and 3ABN. We believed it was important to share the truth of this situation, as questions were being raised, and we desire to be honest and transparent with you, our viewers and donors.

Our administrative team has since decided to pull the video, as its purpose has been served.

When contacted for this article, the network's general manager, Jill Morikone, agreed to be interviewed. However, when reached by phone, she said 3ABN's legal counsel had recommended that she release a statement instead.

"We have sought arbitration through [Adventist Laymen's Services and Industries] and other leaders within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as there are several legal

matters pertaining to Brenda Walsh regarding finances, as well as intellectual property," she said in the statement. "This is why 3ABN

believes the best forum to address these matters would be through ASI, with

an independent attorney present to deliberate on the matters of

law. However, at this time

Brenda Walsh has re-

fused that arbitration

if that discussion in-

cludes the matters of

law."

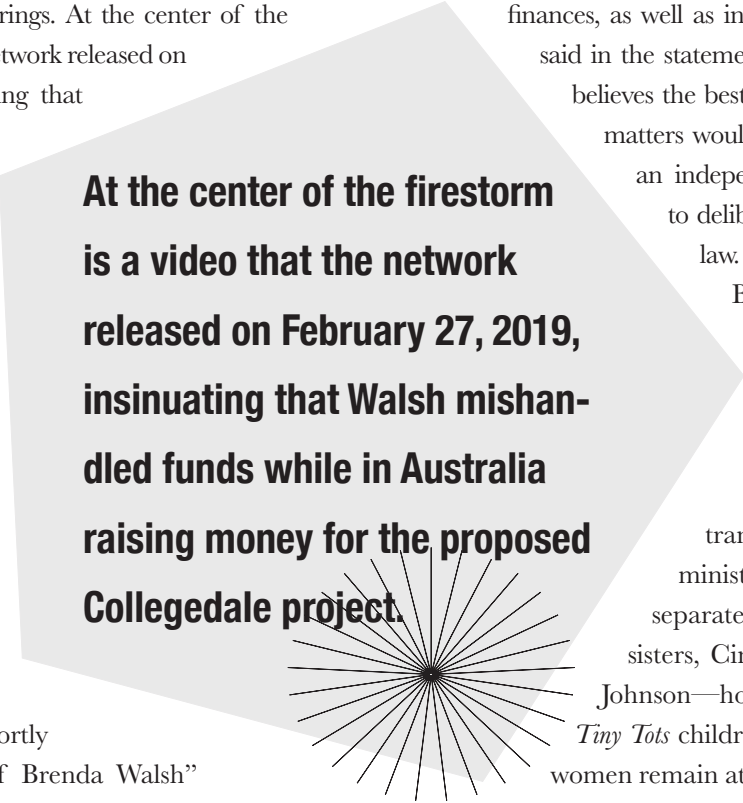
In addition to estranging Walsh from the ministry, the controversy has separated her from her two sisters, Cinda Sanner and Linda Johnson—hosts of 3ABN's popular *Tiny Tots* children's program. The two women remain at 3ABN, helping to produce and promote a new slate of children's

programs.

At the same time, their mother, Bernice Micheff, has publicly defended Walsh on Facebook, accusing Shelton—who stepped down from his role as 3ABN president on Friday, September 27, 2019—of attempting to sully her daughter's reputation because she refused "to commit fraud."

On March 21, she posted on the Supporters of Brenda Walsh page: "your dad and I are proud of you. God has a great work for you to do. We pray that God will protect you from satan's [*sic*] poison darts aimed at you. Stay strong truth will prevail."

The rift exists despite a long-time bond between the Micheffs and Sheltons. 3ABN is located in West Frankfort, Illi-



At the center of the firestorm is a video that the network released on February 27, 2019, insinuating that Walsh mishandled funds while in Australia raising money for the proposed Collegedale project.

nois, which is the hometown of both families. Walsh's father, the late James Micheff, who passed away after a long illness, on September 9, 2019, was a retired pastor, born and raised in the area. Both families attended the same Seventh-day Adventist church. Therefore, when Shelton launched 3ABN, thirty-four years ago, he asked James Micheff to join the ministry, according to Walsh and her mother. Two years later,

In a recent exclusive interview, Walsh said she did not circulate negative information about 3ABN, and the network has never presented proof of their accusations. She vehemently refuted all allegations made against her and provided a document with her response to each accusation.

As for 3ABN's statement about arbitration, Walsh



The Micheff Sisters and their mom, Bernice Micheff, host a *Thursday Night Live* program on July 28, 2016 (Photo courtesy of Brenda Walsh).

James Micheff began preaching on a program called "Walking with the Master." His three daughters—the Micheff Sisters—sang on every program and helped develop shows for the network.

Since then, 3ABN has grown from its humble beginnings into an Adventist media powerhouse. In 2017, the nonprofit reported \$27.3 million in total revenue, more than double the previous year, according to the network's 990 IRS filings. Of that amount, 50 percent was from contributions and grants, and 44 percent from investments. The network reported about \$102 million in total assets.

said ASI had never approached her about the subject. When the controversy first erupted, Pastor Doug Batchelor offered mediation, according to her version of the story. Walsh said she agreed to participate, but Shelton insisted on arbitration. She refused arbitration, unless handled by an attorney, because it would be legally binding.

Walsh said she traveled around the world for three years raising money for the proposed children's studio. She claims 3ABN fired her on December 31, 2018, after she insisted the funds be used for their designated purpose. The video, she believes, is an attempt to damage her credibility

Planning for Eternity

by Brenda Walsh



Raising Christian kids in this world today is extremely challenging, yet the most critical responsibility of every parent. In this fast-paced world, there's a lot of focus on making sure kids are in the right schools, get good grades, exceed at sports, obtain the best musical training, and have a well-balanced social life. But as good as all those things are, the highest priority for parents is preparing children for eternity.

The Bible gives parents explicit instructions in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NIV), "These

commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." In other words, be a living example each and every day, teaching your kids to love God and keep His commandments!

Answering the Call

When I was first asked to be the general manager of 3ABN Kids Network, I went to my knees in prayer, knowing what a tremendous responsibility it would be. I asked my husband Tim to pray, as well, and three days later he said to me, "Brenda, I believe God has been preparing you all these years for this very job. You can't say no to what God is calling you to do." God also impressed upon my heart that this was where He was calling me, and I stepped up to the task with, "Here I am Lord, send me."



PHOTO: DAVID SHEWEN



The Waiting Game

That was almost two years ago, and back then, I fully expected to be up and running in our new studio within a year. But God's timing is different than our human clocks or expectations. He is teaching me to be patient and wait on His perfect timing and His perfect plan. I think the *waiting game* is the most difficult, especially when clearly the need is so great. It takes a lot of planning and funds to build a studio. Hardly a day goes by without someone asking me, "How's the new studio coming along?" and my answer is the same, "Still raising the funds and following God's lead!"

The good news is, *we found the land!* The challenging part—we don't have the funds to pay for it... yet! There are many who sacrifice each month to send their donations for Kids Network, and we are so very grateful for their faithfulness; but much more is needed.

Adult-Focused Ministries

When I attended the General Conference Session last year in San Antonio, Texas, my heart was sad as I walked around the exhibit hall. There were hundreds of booths representing adult ministries—but not even a handful that were dedicated to children's ministries. I long for the day when there will be just as many people working in children's ministries as there are adult ministries, because we need to become more passionate about saving our children!

Our churches have youth departments that grow smaller in attendance each year. Cradle Roll and Kindergarten are usually filled with children—but we start losing them in the Primary and Junior divisions, and by the time they get to Earliteen and Youth, the classrooms are empty!

Kids Sharing Jesus

I recently traveled on a plane filled with over a hundred enthusiastic 16-year-olds who were part of a church youth group coming home from a mission trip, each proudly wearing matching blue shirts with the name of their church on them. I had a middle



The majority of booths at the 2015 General Conference session were focused on adult ministries.

January 2016 | 3ABN World 5

3ABN published an issue of *3ABN World Magazine* in January 2016 with an article promoting the Collegedale studio, a year after the board allegedly voted to abandon the project.

and dissuade viewers from supporting her ministry.

"I would never ever steal from God," she said in the interview.

And that is so critically important to me, and it's important to [3ABN]. Because if they can even plant a doubt in a viewer's mind, then that would stop them from donating to this ministry. . . . And that to me is the goal. . . . That entire attack video was for one purpose and that was to destroy my character and my reputation.

The Financial Allegations

On February 27, 2019, the controversial video, described by Shelton as a "Special Program," appeared on Facebook. In addition to Shelton, those on the set included 3ABN board chairman, Bruce Fjarli; gener-

al manager and board secretary, Jill Morikone; and Morikone's husband, Greg, who served as the network's general vice president until he was named president on September 27, 2019, replacing Shelton.

Shelton said many people had been writing and asking questions, especially regarding the removal of *Kids Time* from 3ABN. Rumors were circulating, and he wanted people to know the truth. Then he proceeded to tell viewers 3ABN's version of the story.

He said Walsh began talking about building the studio in Collegedale after becoming Kids Network general manager in 2013. The 3ABN executive team was open to the idea when they thought she could secure funding in Collegedale. However, as plans for the project progressed, they estimated it was going to cost about \$5 million. Fjarli said Walsh wanted a complex

with four studios that would cost about \$1 million each. She had put a down payment on an \$800,000 property, Shelton said, and the board just could not justify it.

“We said we don’t have the money; even if we wanted to, we don’t have \$5 million,” he said. “We have a beautiful studio here that’s set aside only for the children’s programming.”

Shelton said the 3ABN board voted in 2015 to scrap the project, but Walsh still wanted to move forward. Therefore, he suggested she contact John Bradshaw, at *It Is Written*, to ask if she could use his new studio, still under construction in Collegedale.

Walsh, on the other hand, said she was not notified of 3ABN’s decision to abandon the project until 2018.

For three years following the alleged

vote, she continued to promote the project on 3ABN television and public events in the presence of network executives. Video footage from the 2018 3ABN spring camp meeting shows Walsh on stage with the Morikones before soliciting funds for the new studio. And, in January of 2016, Walsh appeared on the cover of *3ABN World Magazine*.

Inside the publication, which included a column by Shelton, is a two-page article written by Walsh featuring the project.

“If you would like to see more Christ-centered programs for kids, please prayerfully consider supporting 3ABN’s Kids Network,” the article reads.

The need is great, not only for production costs, but also to build our new children’s studio. If the Holy Spirit impresses, please send your tax-deductible love gifts to 3ABN Kids Network, Post Office Box 220, West Frankfort, Illinois, 62896, or call us at 618-627-4651. You may also donate

online through PayPal from many countries at 3abnkids.tv. Thank you for all that you do for this ministry and for God’s children around the world.

As for the “It is Written” suggestion, when contacted for this article, Bradshaw said Walsh approached the ministry about two years ago to explore her options. “There were discussions, but they didn’t go anywhere. . . . I think what she is looking at doing is something that would require a lot of time. And it’s not something that we would be able to accommodate.”

When the Bradshaw option fell through, Shelton said he recommended that Walsh separate from 3ABN and form her own ministry. He said Walsh informed the board in June 2018 that she planned to separate at the end of the year.

In the video, Shelton and Jill Morikone also accused Walsh of collecting money in Australia and depositing it into a personal Australian bank account, which they said 3ABN never gave her permission to open. They said Walsh had accused 3ABN of spending funds allocated for the project, but she had full control of the money as general manager.

In addition, the four board members accused Walsh of making unreasonable demands, insisting that 3ABN financially support her for two years, pay her ministry’s streaming costs for two years, transfer the 3ABN Kids Network donations to her ministry, and agree to a ten-year non-compete clause. They said she wanted to use the 3ABN *Kids Time* trademark. And, since separating from the ministry, she had been using 3ABN intellectual property without the network’s permission. Jill Morikone said a former 3ABN employee, now helping Walsh with her ministry, had shut 3ABN out of the 3ABN Kids4Jesus website, which had since been shut down.

“As of the time of this recording, we do not have ac-

Walsh said she traveled around the world for three years raising money for the proposed children’s studio. She claims 3ABN fired her on December 31, 2018, after she insisted the funds be used for their designated purpose.

cess to the 3ABN Kids Network app or the 3ABN Kids-Time4Jesus YouTube account,” said Morikone.

And then that was taken over and turned into “Miss Brenda’s Fan Page,” which at this time—as of the time of this recording—we’re able to shut that down. But, then, a new YouTube page popped up, called “Miss Brenda and Kids,” and that has all of 3ABN’s trademark programming on it.

In presenting the information, the 3ABN representatives flashed exhibits on the screen, including a 3ABN envelope that Walsh had allegedly used in Australia with an option to make checks out to Brenda Walsh, a document with her alleged demands, and screenshots of various websites that she allegedly had established using 3ABN materials.

In the video, Shelton—who has had four wives and two divorces (his first wife died in a car accident)—also referred to Walsh’s recent divorce. He said 3ABN had used Kids Network money to provide housing and utilities for her and “her husband, or ex-husband, Tim.”

In closing, the four board members announced that they had hired a new general manager for children’s programming, assuring viewers that they would be rolling out a new series of children’s programs in the near future.

In a recent interview, Gilley, who is now retired, said he enthusiastically supported the new children’s studio when it was estimated at about \$700,000, but Walsh kept expanding the project, making it unaffordable. The network had hoped to get financial backing from wealthy families in the Collegedale area, as well as land from Southern Adventist University, but those plans never materialized.

Gilley said he left 3ABN before the conflict between Walsh and network executives started and he has no idea what occurred thereafter. Yet, he supported 3ABN’s version of events, stating that Walsh is not perfect. He did not see anything wrong with the video released by 3ABN but could not confirm the network’s claim that Walsh had misused funds.

Gilley said, “I feel very badly that they’re all having this problem; I feel real bad about that. I think there’s a place in ministry for Brenda; and, obviously, 3ABN is the cornerstone ministry of our church. All of the ministries use 3ABN, so it

is very important. It’s not a ministry; it’s a network of ministries.”

He continued, “In other words, ‘It Is Written,’ their biggest bunch of money comes from the programs off of 3ABN. The same is true of every one of our ministries. Around the world they go because of 3ABN. Hope Channel doesn’t have anywhere near the impact. People don’t realize it, but there’s just not even any comparison.”

Bradshaw said the statement does not surprise him since Gilley once served as president of 3ABN. However, he politely disagreed with Gilley’s assessment of 3ABN’s impact on his ministry’s finances.

“Be that as it may, we appreciate our relationship with 3ABN, there’s no question about that,” he said. “But that’s a fascinating statement.”

The Public Battle

On February 28, 2019, Walsh responded briefly to 3ABN’s allegations with a one-minute video of her own, posting it on Facebook and Brendawalsh.com. In that video, she denied any wrongdoing and took particular offense at Shelton’s mention of her divorce on the 3ABN video, stating that she had intended to keep it a private matter.

“I can assure you that outside of the fact that I am divorced, which is deeply personal and private, the narrative and the vast majority of the discussion points in their video are blatantly false or misleading,” she said, her voice breaking with emotion.

In the months following the 3ABN video, Walsh and her supporters accused 3ABN of pressuring church leaders to cancel her scheduled appearances in the Philippines, Australia, and other places. They questioned why denominational leaders were not stepping up to defend her from what they considered unsubstantiated accusations and public humiliation.

In one instance, North American Division president, Dan Jackson, wrote a letter to Adventist union and university officials in the Philippines, requesting that they reverse a decision to cancel her speaking engagement for a week of prayer. In a letter emailed by his secretary on February 22, 2019, Jackson wrote:

I am aware of the situation between her and the 3ABN ministry that has led us to this point and having said that, I am giving a full personal endorsement regarding Brenda and her ministry.

I pray that your group will exercise the grace to reverse your decision in order that she will be able to minister to the students and staff at AUP. May God bless you all in your deliberations.

On March 21, 2019, administrators of the Supporters of Brenda Walsh Facebook page posted a message stating that Shelton had cancelled her Philippines speaking engagement, sending Pastor John Lomacang and his wife instead—all expenses paid.

That same day, Lomacang—pastor of the Thompsonville Seventh-day Adventist Church at 3ABN Worship Center—responded with a comment. After highlighting their close relationship with Walsh over the years, he defended his and his wife’s trip to the Philippines and cautioned Walsh’s supporters against jumping to conclusions.

“We were not sent to the Philippines to hurt Brenda. If it was not the Lord’s will, it would not have taken place. The Philippines University and the SDA Union of that region made the decision to [un-invite] Brenda Walsh. Brenda presented her position and 3ABN presented theirs, but the decision to not have her go was not made by 3ABN.”

On April 27, 2019, Walsh made an appearance at Collegedale Community Church during the mid-day service. First, she told the children’s story, and then she shared examples of previous challenges she had overcome in life. She spoke of her experience as a battered wife by her first husband—documented in her book *Battered to Blessed*—and then as a stage-four ovarian cancer survivor. Walsh said she could not defend herself in those circumstances and depended on God to deliver her.

“Now, Brenda, you are currently being attacked by lies and misrepresentations,” said Senior Pastor Jerry Arnold. “How are you defending yourself?”

Walsh told the audience, consisting of hundreds of people:

The truth is that I can’t defend myself; and

TIMELINE

2013 – Brenda Walsh named general manager of 3ABN Kids Network

Children's production studio in Tennessee promoted on network

2015 – 3ABN Board allegedly votes to abandon children’s studio

2016 – 3ABN World Magazine features children's studio plans

2017 – Fundraising continues for children's studio

June 2018 – Brenda Walsh informs 3ABN board of her plans to form her own ministry

September 2018 – Brenda Walsh allegedly informed of the network’s 2015 decision to abandon the children’s studio

October 23 to November 22, 2018 – Walsh travels to Australia where 3ABN leaders now allege she mishandled funds, which she denies

December 2018 – 3ABN severs their connection with Brenda Walsh

January 2019 – 3ABN notifies donors of split, giving them the option of having their money stay at 3ABN or go to Brenda Walsh Ministries

February 27, 2019 – 3ABN produces video laying out their case against Brenda Walsh. It is pulled after 48 hours

February 28, 2019 – Brenda Walsh releases her response to the 3ABN video

September 19, 2019 – 3ABN writes to donors reversing their decision to give designated funds from January letter to Brenda Walsh Ministries

September 27, 2019 – Danny Shelton passes the baton of the presidency to Greg Morikone

here's why. I could easily show proof and truthfully show for every accusation that's been made against me in an attack video that went literally around the world. . . . I could show truthfully and prove that every accusation is false. But if I do that, it will bring down an entire network. And the ministry will be hurt, God's people will be hurt, our church will be hurt. And God has impressed me, "Brenda, your response is silence. Be still and know that I am God."

Arnold closed with a prayer for Walsh and her ministry.

On June 8, 2019, Shelton responded to Walsh's Collegedale Community Church appearance at a 3ABN camp meeting Sabbath service.

"I don't want to get into negatives, but there's never been more attacks against 3ABN than there is today," he told the audience. "My wife said, 'I can't believe you don't lose any sleep.' And I said, 'Well, it's God's problem, because . . . it's His ministry. He'll take care of it. None of us are perfect.'"

Without calling Walsh by name, Shelton said he had seen a video of her saying, "I could take 3ABN down if I want to."

"And I'm like this is someone who used to be here, used to be a partner; how can you go say those type of things?" Shelton asked.

"Now, you can run me down. You can run Greg and Jill down. You can run down other leaders, and none of us are perfect. And guess what? Neither are you," he said gesturing to the audience.

Nobody can tear this down. The only people that can tear down 3ABN is all of us if we quit giving the truth. There is nobody on earth powerful enough. Cause if the Devil could'a done it, he would'a done it 30 years ago 'fore we ever started. So am I shaking in my boots? Do I lose any sleep about it? Absolutely not; not going to, because I want to encourage you. I know there are attacks against you in your life.

He referred to the sixth commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Kill," stating: "Interesting that killing somebody's character is of the Devil."

Lastly, Shelton said people had been calling 3ABN

threatening to stop donating, without hearing the network's side of the story.

"So, you know, in my mind is, 'That's okay. You're the one missing the blessing,'" he said. "'Because you don't give to me anyway; it's to the ministry. And you're missing the blessing of being part of a ministry that is literally reaching people and the good fruit.'"

To close out the segment, he introduced Walsh's sister, Cinda Sanner, who joined the worship service by Skype from Loma Linda. Sanner reaffirmed her commitment to the network and encouraged the audience to support financially. Before leaving, she made an obvious reference to Walsh.

"Family is the most important thing to me, but when family members take their eyes off Jesus, that doesn't mean that I need to take my eyes off Jesus," she said, with emotion in her voice. "We need to stand for Jesus and stand for truth no matter what. God doesn't say that it's all going to be easy, but God says be true to me."

When contacted for this article, Sanner said she knows for a fact that allegations against her sister are true. She could have said more at the 3ABN camp meeting, but she spoke in generalities because of the delicate family situation, she said.

The three sisters had worked side-by-side in ministry since childhood, Sanner explained. They spoke on the phone every day before the controversy erupted.

"To take a stand that we don't support Brenda, that's extremely hard because we love her," she said. "You know, in the last days you have to choose between the people you love and God. And I'm choosing God because I know the truth."

In a recent interview, Walsh said her sisters have never reached out to her or asked to hear her side of the story. She was at Oakwood University as a guest speaker when Sanner made the comments at camp meeting.

"At the very moment she was actually saying that I walked away from Jesus, I was in God's house at Oakwood University listening to one of the most incredible sermons," she said. "I can tell you that I have not walked away from Jesus, that I love Him with all my heart. I will continue to serve Him with my whole heart, and I will do whatever God's asking me to do."

When asked about her reaction to her two daughters' public stance against their sister, Bernice Micheff said it breaks her heart.

"Well, I consider them both rebels—the sisters. Even



Brenda Walsh appears on a 3ABN *Thursday Night Live* program with Mollie Steenson, Danny Shelton, and Jim Gilley, talking about the new Kids Network in April 2014 (Photo courtesy of Chrystique Neibauer).

their Dad is for Brenda,” she said before her husband’s recent passing. “I told them, plainly, how I felt. I begged them not to go [with 3ABN], and they chose to go anyway. It’s a rebel action.”

She blames Shelton for what has transpired. “I’ve known Danny since he was a small child,” she explained. “I knew his mother and all of his family, and we were all good friends. But I tell you, Danny is not the same person he used to be. He used to be kind and loving and thoughtful, and now there’s too much power and too much money.”

The Walsh Defense

After the incident at 3ABN camp meeting, Walsh agreed to a full interview. She said spiritual mentors and denominational leaders had been encouraging her to respond publicly to the allegations, which had spread around the world.

Some of the details she provided coincided with comments made during the 2013 *Thursday Night Live* program, which featured Shelton and Gilley interviewing her. On that program, both Gilley and Walsh said Gilley initially ap-

proached her about building the studio in Collegedale when she returned from a trip to Australia. He believed it would be a good location because of the proximity to Southern Adventist University and churches with children in the area. Walsh said God had given her the same idea while she was away, and she had written it in a letter that she intended to send to Gilley, but never did. They both considered it a sign from God.

During that interview, Walsh also mentioned that her then-husband, Tim, was working in Collegedale. At times, she spent almost seven months out of the year taping programs at 3ABN, she said, and looked forward to the opportunity to spend more time at home.

In the interview for this article, Walsh said 3ABN cut production time for *Kids Time* and other ministries to only six weeks out of the year in 2014, after launching Dare to Dream, a ministry headed by Yvonne Lewis-Shelton, who is now Shelton’s current wife. She said 3ABN has not produced any new *Kids Time* programs since 2014, despite her requests for more production time. The proposed chil-

dren's studio in Collegedale was an opportunity to produce more children's programming.

Walsh said she traveled around the globe, visiting all fifty states, most of the Caribbean islands, Europe, South America, Canada, Australia, the South Pacific, New Zealand, and other places as a guest speaker. She collected offering for the children's studio at every speaking engagement. She lived on speaker fees, she said, and the offering she collected went directly to 3ABN. She either delivered the cash and checks to 3ABN personally or by mail.

Walsh said she did so based on instructions from Shelton, who told her it would be money laundering if she de-

verted the currency to US dollars while in Australia, and then gave the money to 3ABN in cash. Walsh said she never received receipts from 3ABN for any of the money she collected in the states or abroad and trusted the network to be honest.

"Both Danny and Jim [Gilley] were not only aware of this account—but they approved it!" she wrote in the document refuting the allegations against her. "Also, the envelopes that were shown [on the 3ABN video] were actually ordered by 3ABN and 3ABN paid for them!"

Walsh also disputed 3ABN's claim that they paid for her housing and utility bills. She said the network allowed

her to use her home as office space for the Collegedale project, and the bills paid were business related. She denied accusations that the project would cost \$5 million, and said she never put a down payment on any property.

Though she spent years looking for land in Collegedale, Shelton and Gilley turned down every property she proposed, Walsh said. In April of 2018, she finally approached Shelton about the issue, pressing him to move forward with the project.



The Putman Sisters and their brother pose for pictures with "Miss Brenda" on the *Kids Time* set in 2014 (Photo courtesy of Brenda Walsh).

posited the funds into a bank account and then transferred them electronically. She refuted 3ABN's claim that she controlled the Kids Network funds, stating that they never allowed her to access the Kids Network bank account.

In Australia, she opened a personal bank account for money collected from her book sales and speaker fees because the bank would not allow her to open an account in a business's or ministry's name, Walsh said. When she became general manager of Kids Network, she asked Shelton and Gilley if she could use it to temporarily place money donated for the new studio, according to her version of the story. To avoid the appearance of money laundering, she did not transfer the funds electronically, she said. Instead, she con-

I had someone give me \$50,000. And I said, "Danny, we have got to start doing what we said we're going to do. This studio should've been built. You know, it's five years I've been raising money for this. When are we going to do this?"

Walsh said that's when Shelton first told her that building the studio in Collegedale didn't make sense. "He said, 'You build a studio down there, people start giving money to you, they're not going to give money to me.' And he said, 'Pretty soon I won't be able to keep my lights on.'"

That is when Shelton recommended that she form a separate 501(c)(3) for the project, according to Walsh. He

said producing children’s programs was too expensive for 3ABN and he offered to give her everything she needed to move the project forward, including the funds raised for 3ABN Kids Network.

After praying about the matter, she agreed to the arrangement. She said Shelton insisted that she inform the 3ABN board of her desire to separate. Walsh made her presentation on June 6, 2018, and board members approved her request for separation.

Walsh provided an October 5, 2018 email that she allegedly received from Morikone as a follow-up to a board meeting and a conversation that Walsh and Shelton had the previous evening. Attached to the email is a proposed separation agreement, laying out the details for Walsh’s departure.

Thank you, Brenda, for your tireless service and dedication as a full-time volunteer for well over 20 years! You have worked early and late to help spread the three angels’ messages—the gospel message—to young and old alike. The programs that have been produced through *Kids Time*, *Kids Time Praise*, and the others have been such good quality, and I know have touched countless lives for eternity. Many people will be in the kingdom of Heaven as a result of something they saw on 3ABN Kids Network, and that will be partly due to your efforts and the efforts of those who worked alongside you in producing children’s programs. Only in eternity will we see the full results. Thank you for your commitment to spread His Word and to produce programs with excellence!

In the email, Morikone also allegedly wrote:

I’m attaching the proposed separation agreement that the 3ABN Board voted on yesterday. This is only a draft, as we want your input, too. Once we have received that, I will send to our lawyer, to dress it up a bit. :) So, the final wording might be a bit different, but we wanted to show it to you first, before proceeding to that level. Of course, once it’s been through the lawyer, we’ll show it to you again before it is signed.

The content of the proposed Separation Agreement was as follows:

Section 1—3ABN agrees to give Brenda Walsh Ministries the following:

- A. The money in the Kids Network fund will be given to Brenda Walsh Ministries by December 31, 2018. At present, this is just over \$800,000.
- B. The 3ABN trademarked names, *Kids Time*, *Kids Time Praise*, *Kids Time Missions*, and *Tiny Tots for Jesus*. Any new programs produced after January 1, 2019 under those names will be considered the property of Brenda Walsh Ministries. Any previously produced programs under those names, whether edited or unedited, shall be the property of 3ABN.
- C. Free access to air any of the children’s programs that 3ABN has produced prior to December 31, 2018, on her new children’s network. Any other ministry or network that desires these programs needs to contact 3ABN directly. Those programs are to be aired as is, and all mention of 3ABN, whether logos or credits, in the open and close will not be edited out.
- D. The props and equipment agreed upon as belonging to Kids Network. Brenda will remove any agreed upon items within 30 days from 3ABN’s Studios to a storage place of her own.
- E. All of the studio time already booked for Kids Network in 2018 (for free).
- F. The Kids Club Bible School
- G. The Kids Time website
- H. The Kids Time app

Section 2—3ABN will retain the following:

- A. All children’s programming, whether edited or unedited, that is produced before December 31, 2018 will be owned by 3ABN, and, as such, 3ABN will have full right to use or distribute how they wish without any financial compensation to Brenda Walsh Ministries.
- B. 3ABN owned cameras and production/studio equipment in any of the 3ABN studios.

Section 3—3ABN does not agree to the following:

- A. To provide any funds, equipment, or staff to Brenda Walsh Ministries.
- B. To provide free air time to Brenda Walsh Ministries for

her new children's network. Any potential airing of programs produced by Brenda Walsh after January 1, 2019, will be subject to the same air time rate as any other ministry.

- C. To provide streaming services for the new Kids Time Network. That will need to be provided by Brenda Walsh Ministries directly.

When contacted to verify that she emailed the proposed separation agreement, Morikone again declined an interview. Instead, she released the following statement:

Since Brenda Walsh approached 3ABN's Board in June of 2018, with a request to separate from 3ABN, there has been a great deal of correspondence between 3ABN and Brenda regarding the details of separation. Numerous verbal discussions, as well as written communication, have taken place, including a proposal from 3ABN's Board of Directors, offering Brenda an extremely generous separation agreement. Brenda refused the Board's generous proposal, and instead came back with further, unreasonable demands. Just after that time, the Board also became aware of information about how Brenda may have handled certain donations and financial transactions that raised serious red flags for 3ABN. Despite that 3ABN repeatedly asked Brenda to explain these matters and provide us with documentation to clear her name, our requests were refused. We continue to pray for Brenda, as this whole situation is very unfortunate. However, we are thankful that Brenda's two sisters, Cinda Sanner and Linda Johnson, are still hosting programs on 3ABN, as well as producing new programs for 3ABN Kids Network.

Walsh said she made some recommended changes to the document, with input from Shelton. The proposed revisions included more specifics than the original document, and called for additional support from 3ABN to get the new studio up and running. Shelton told her 3ABN's attorney would draw up the official separation papers, Walsh said. Months went by, and she kept asking why it was taking so long.

In the revised document, Walsh proposed that 3ABN

give the following to Brenda Walsh Ministries, in addition to what it had already been offered:

- All future funds that 3ABN receives from donors indicated for the benefit of 3ABN Kids Network, children's ministries, or any of the children's programs.
- All photographs and digital images pertaining to all children's programming and all photographs and digital images of Brenda Walsh.
- All props and equipment agreed upon as belonging to Kids Network, including costumes/wardrobe, and any sets or props specifically used for children's programs including the remote Panasoni Lumix DC-GH5 camera and accessories that Kids Network paid for.
- An additional six weeks of studio time in 2019 for recording children's programs, with Brenda Walsh Ministries agreeing to pay for crew needed to record programs.
- 3ABN financial support for Kids Club (Bible Lessons) for one year, ending on December 31, 2019.
- Air time, at no cost, for the promotion of building a new studio for Kids Time Network, ending December 31, 2019.

At the fall 2018, 3ABN camp meeting, Shelton asked Walsh to meet with him and Fjarli. According to Walsh, they met behind a stage in the VIP green room, where Fjarli's wife was also present.

They started off with just buttering me up, telling me how wonderful I am. . . . Bruce said, "It doesn't matter where I travel. . . . If I say, 'I'm with 3ABN,' they say '*Kids Time*.' It's the most popular program on 3ABN."

According to Walsh's version of the story, Shelton and Fjarli told her she raised more money than anyone else at 3ABN and asked her to reconsider the separation. They said she was getting old and should consider retiring but she could continue helping to raise money for the network.

When contacted for Shelton's and Fjarli's response to Walsh's version of events, 3ABN declined the interviews.

However, Gilley, in an interview for this article, referred to Walsh's age, stating: "She's not a young kid," and that it made no sense to start the children's studio at her age.

Studies that we did showed that her programs were watched by the adults and not by the kids. I think her biggest ministry is actually with women—Women's Ministry. She does a wonderful job talking about marriage and challenges there. She's an inspiring speaker. She loves the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever she goes, she witnesses. But that

three years knowing they did not intend to build the facility.

I said, "Danny, what are you talking about? . . . Every day, almost, I have a promo that airs on 3ABN asking for funds for that children's studio. . . . Just a year after you voted not to build the studio, . . . I'm on the cover of your *3ABN World Magazine* and my article in that magazine is all about our Collegedale studio, complete with a map and picture of Collegedale. . . . Every single year at 3ABN Camp Meeting, I'm up there, live, ask-



Brenda Walsh poses for a *Kids Time Praise Live* program at the 3ABN camp meeting in 2018 (Photo courtesy of Brenda Walsh).

does not make Brenda right on this issue.

Reflecting on her alleged meeting with Shelton and Fjarli, Walsh said she was flabbergasted and offended by their suggestion that she was too old to work for God. In fact, she told them, she felt called by God to build the Collegedale children's studio. That is when Fjarli allegedly told her the 3ABN board had voted to scrap the project three years earlier. She said it was the first time she had heard of the vote, and she accused them of fraud for having her raise money for

ing millions of people around the world to give money for the studio, including this year. . . . Jill and Greg were on the stage with me smiling." I said, "Bruce, shame on you, you're in the audience. I got up in God's house almost every Sabbath and I asked God's people to give money for something you never intended to do." I said, "Shame on both of you. . . . That's fraud. That's illegal; it's dishonest. . . . I won't be a part of it."

After her reaction, Shelton and Fjarli agreed to move forward with the separation agreement by December 1, 2018, according to Walsh. However, the date rolled around to no avail. She said Shelton called her the Thursday before Christmas and told her his attorney said he did not have to give her the money.

That was the last time I talked to Danny. December 30th I got an email from Jill. I was here at my home, and it had an attachment on the email from the board chair, Bruce Fjarli, letting me know that effective immediately, I was no longer the general manager of 3ABN Kids Network. I was to remove my name from anything to do with 3ABN, all social media.

I literally read that and I read it again, and I couldn't believe it. And I think I probably cried for three days. I didn't eat, I didn't sleep. . . . I'm literally just walking around my house, holding on to my Bible for dear life because I never felt so alone in my entire life.

In addition to terminating her, Walsh said, 3ABN also fired her assistant, Mellisa Hoffman, and the network's graphic design director, Chrystique Neibauer. She said both women are now working for Brenda Walsh Ministries.

Bernice Micheff said she had been coordinating Bible lessons for 3ABN's Kid's Club for more than sixteen years as a volunteer. She said 3ABN shut down the lessons abruptly when Walsh was terminated. She said about 40,000 people had benefited from the Bible lessons over the years, mostly children.

"They not only hurt Brenda, they hurt all these kids that were not allowed to finish, and yet they claim to have a heart for children," she said. "They don't have a heart for children; they want the money that children's programs bring in."

Walsh stated that, before leaving 3ABN, she produced seventy-five new children's programs. The network has been airing them, she said, but 3ABN edited her out of the videos and removed her name from the credits. Walsh also claims 3ABN executives removed all of her books, CDs, and DVDs from the network's store but continues to collect royalties and still has an obligation to market the materials.

In addition to accusing her of misusing funds in Australia, Walsh said 3ABN leaders have told individuals that she double-dipped financially, having both 3ABN and churches pay her airfare for speaking engagements.

Walsh said 3ABN provides airfare for general managers and their spouses when they travel on behalf of the network. She said some churches could not afford her speaking fee of \$500 a day and offered to pay her airfare instead. She consulted with Shelton, and they both agreed she could turn in travel expenses to 3ABN and the extra money could go toward her speaking fees, she said.

Walsh said her assistant recently reviewed all her travel records and found only seven cases where that occurred. She said the amount churches paid for her air travel amounted to less than the speaker fees in all cases, and she saved 3ABN over \$30,000 by having churches that could afford her speaking fees and airfare cover the expenses.

In addition, Walsh said she has personal knowledge that Shelton has personal conflicts of interest regarding funds, making millions of dollars from books and products that he sells to 3ABN for a profit. She said he charges the network for the materials and then offers cases of this books to viewers free of charge, leading them to believe the books are paid for by generous donors.

Walsh presented invoices that she claims were submitted to 3ABN by Shelton's publishing company, DLS Publishing, Inc., from 2012 to 2019. The total amounted to \$1.3 million, most of it collected over the last two years. (\$494,945 in 2017 and \$487,714 in 2018.)

"If he had not personally profited from taking all those donations and selling his books, the children's studio could already have been built and producing children's programs by now," she said.

Walsh said it is not her intention to hurt Shelton or 3ABN, and she tried to avoid a public spectacle. However, she could no longer remain silent as the attacks against her continued.

He chose to publicly attack me, and viewers have been begging for answers. I kept quiet for six months, but it has been relentless. He continues to spread bigger and bigger lies. At some point, my silence becomes consensus, and viewers are only able hear the lies that he's spreading.

The Donor Dilemma

Walsh said she initially felt angry and hurt, reflecting on all that she had sacrificed for 3ABN, but the Holy Spirit touched her heart and convicted her to forgive.

“It was New Year’s Day, January 1, 2019. It’s now like five o’clock in the afternoon, and I was no longer having my little pity party,” she said. “I was praising Jesus, and I was like, ‘Okay, Lord. Now what do we do? Where do we go?’”

She said, God told her: “Brenda, build the studio.”

Walsh explained that, since then, she has been trying to raise money for the Collegedale children’s studio and leadership center, which she described as a ministry that will produce kids’ programs and train children to be leaders for Christ.

At the same time, she and 3ABN remain locked in a legal battle over intellectual property and donations. When Walsh posted *Kids Time* videos on her YouTube channel a few months ago, 3ABN filed a complaint with the video-sharing website, and, according to Walsh, the channel was shut down. She said she retained an attorney who says she has legal rights to the material she produced while volunteering at 3ABN because she was not an employee and never signed a contract waiving those rights.

Caught in the crossfire are people from all over the world who contributed to the Collegedale project when it was under the auspices of 3ABN.

In addition to the two letters sent by 3ABN in January and September, Brenda Walsh Ministries sent a separate letter to donors, informing them that she was shocked to learn that 3ABN had ended the project without notifying her.

I feel terrible about this and I want to personally say how very sorry I am that your donations did not go for the intended use. I would never have asked

anyone to donate if I had known that 3ABN did not intend to follow through on their commitment.

In the letter, Walsh said she felt impressed by God to move forward with the project. She encouraged donors to fill out an enclosed form and mail it back to Brenda Walsh Ministries.

“Once I receive your form, I will scan and email it to 3ABN—that way both parties will be aware of your intention,” she instructed. “If you would like to continue to help in our global efforts to introduce children to Jesus, please prayerfully consider supporting Brenda Walsh Ministries.”

However, Walsh said her attorney recently received a

letter from 3ABN’s legal counsel, stating that Brenda Walsh Ministries has no legal claim to the funds and the money would be returned to the donors. In the September letter, 3ABN notified donors of that finding. Her attorney is considering the next move.

Bradshaw said he has no idea who is at fault, but it is unfortunate that the conflict between 3ABN and Walsh blew up so publicly.

I think it’s really, really unfortunate when people—whoever those people are—choose to go public about their disagreements or dissatisfaction in church matters. . . . It’s pretty hard not to go public these days because of social media and the Internet. But to me, it’s a real pity.

I tell you, Danny is not the same person he used to be. He used to be kind and loving and thoughtful, and now there’s too much power and too much money.
- Bernice Micheff

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