

'I feared he would rape me': Scoliosis sufferer on how she put her trust in a faith healer only to be repeatedly sexually molested in seedy flat

- **Joanne Mulholland, 41, met Michael Ireland, 60, through spiritual church**
- **She received treatment for crippling scoliosis from him**
- **Was too frightened to speak out when his touching became inappropriate**
- **Ireland, from Stockport, was sentenced to 16 years imprisonment**
- **Joanne told her story today on This Morning**

[By Martha De Lacey](#)

A woman who suffered a series of harrowing sexual assaults at the hands of her trusted faith healer has spoken of the moment she finally, fearing he would rape her, reported his crimes to the police - and why it took her so long to admit to herself what was happening.

Joanne Mulholland, 41, first met self-employed alternative therapist Michael Ireland, 60, from Stockport, through the spiritual church she attended to give her respite and hope from crippling lifelong scoliosis, a debilitating and degenerative curvature of the spine that had led to arthritis.

A well-known and well-liked figure within the spiritual community, Ireland suggested to Joanne that he could cure the agonising physical complaints which several medical operations had failed to rectify with his 'healing hands'. Desperate for anyone who could help her, Joanne agreed to pay him a visit.

Joanne Mulholland telling her horrific story of sexual abuse on This Morning.

But even after the first session in his incongruously seedy high-rise flat, Joanne felt uncomfortable with Ireland's behaviour, on one hand completely professional, on the other inappropriately intimate. 'He was a jovial character, I'm a jovial character, so we hit it off immediately,' Joanne explained to Philip Schofield and Holly Willoughby on This Morning today. 'I felt I had nothing to lose.'

She continued: 'The first time he had me on the bed and scanned his hands above my body he told me exactly what was wrong and warned I'd end up in a wheelchair. I was so impressed he picked that up - that's what I'd been told by surgeons.'

Michael Ireland, a self-employed Reiki master, who was imprisoned for sexual offences.

'But then, since I also practice Reiki, he asked me to pass my hands over him. When I got to the area above his groin he said, "There, you've felt it, haven't you? I'm impotent. Doctors can't do anything about it." I was so embarrassed and it seemed inappropriate, but I like to always think the best of people and not judge them so the caring side of me did nothing.'

'He said to me then: "You're not going to come back again, are you? That's what they all do." I should have run for the hills but I was desperate.'

Things quickly became more intense. Though Joanne was fully clothed in the paid-for sessions, Ireland found ways of moving his hands under her top or down her trousers, using excuses to grope her such as 'your pressure point is so deep here, I just need to put my hand under your shirt to reach it', and 'you're full of so many demons, let me just unblock them by unzipping your jeans'.

After Ireland had begun touching Joanne beneath her underwear, he changed. Joanne said: 'His voice changed, he started breathing heavily, he was rougher and I was scared. I had to get out but I didn't tell - I felt ashamed that I'd put myself in such a vulnerable situation when I should have run.' Eventually, Joanne came forward to the police, and then the floodgates opened. Other women came forward, including two who had been 15 at the time of Ireland's attack, and one who had been only seven.

Ireland was jailed at the beginning of March, admitting five counts of sexual assault against Joanne. The fraudster admitted a total of 25 offences against eight women over a 25-year period, including indecent assault and sexual activity with a child.

The court also heard Ireland, who was sentenced to 16 years imprisonment, already had a conviction for indecently assaulting a girl under 14 when he was a teenager.

Joanne said: 'He'd manipulated so many people, and who knows how many more that were too scared to come forward. But when I saw him in court, sitting there with his head in his hands, I just felt pity for him.' Joanne, now qualified as a holistic therapist herself, is writing a book to deal with what has happened.