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## Mother says abuse was test from God

December 07, 1990 | By Raymond L. Sanchez | Raymond L. Sanchez, Evening Sun Staff

The mother of three sisters who were repeatedly raped by their father has been painted as a submissive wife who saw the abuse as a test from God.

Today, as part of a pre-arranged plea-bargain, that father was sentenced to three consecutive life sentences, suspended to 30 years, despite written pleas of leniency from the three sisters, who also had asked the same for their mother, sentenced yesterday to 15 years.

"It's been hell for me, too, because I love them dearly and I suffer, too," the father, 43, said after the sentencing by Baltimore Circuit Court Judge Kenneth Lavon Johnson. "We were a very loving, caring family. There are thousands of people out there right now who are suffering from this same kind of problem."

The mother now says she would like to devote her life to working with abused children.

The parents are not being identified by The Evening Sun to protect the identities of their daughters, who are now 17, 20 and 23 years of age.

The rapes remained a family secret until last March, when one of the daughters scribbled a note on the bottom of a history test: "I hate life. I hate school. I hate people. I hope I die, soon . . . !!!!"

The parents pleaded guilty Oct. 29 to three counts of first-degree rape and three counts of sexual child abuse. Prosecutors charged that the mother participated by taking her daughters to her husband over a nine-year period.

The rapes caused numerous pregnancies that ended in abortions. Although prosecutors said the mother sometimes turned her back as the girls screamed and fought, the defendant told the judge in a letter that she never witnessed the rapes.

The mother's passivity was influenced by her religious beliefs, a court-appointed psychiatrist wrote in a pre-sentencing medical report. Bridget D. Shepherd, the mother's lawyer, yesterday described her client as a woman who interpreted the rapes as "God's trial" of the family.

"I want to devote the rest of my life to working in some capacity of child abuse to make amends for my weakness," the mother said in a letter asking the judge for leniency.

Dr. Thomas J. Oglesby, a court-appointed psychiatrist, concluded after a Nov. 28 interview with the defendant that she was not suffering from any mental disorders.

The psychiatrist reported that the mother interpreted the rapes as a test from God of her "will and strength." She never denounced her husband or expressed anger toward him during the interview.

In her letter, the mother said she never revealed the abuse for "fear of this shameful thing overshadowing the good in our family."

"My rationale also was that [God] . . . does not burden us with a burden we cannot bear and that we would be tested with trials and tribulations in life," she wrote.

Citing the academic successes of her daughters -- one graduated with honors and the others are honor students -- the mother said she believed "they had survived the trial with no severe effects."

She expressed a desire to be a part of the lives of her seven children to "give them back some sense of security" and "re-establish our family bond." Four younger children are living with relatives.

Johnson granted the mother the right to supervised visits with her daughters after the completion of her sentence.

In her interview with psychiatrist, the mother revealed that she, too, was a victim of rape as a teen-ager and kept it a secret.

"That was my way of dealing with things," she said. "If no one knew about them then they never happened."