

Protect children, each and every one

The most recent inductees to the Maryland State Athletic Hall of Fame included Thori Staples Bryan. She was a world-class soccer player and a fine track and field athlete, but what I recall most about her was her mom, Sonda.

As The Sun's resident track nut, I met Thori at Joppatowne High School in the spring of 1990 or '91. The coach who arranged our interview left Thori and I to ourselves, but her mother insisted on sitting in on the conversation, making my high-minded self quite irate.

About 25 years later, I sat down to chat with some service-oriented seniors at one of our all-girls high schools. Their moderator asked if she could leave me with the young ladies for a moment, entirely appropriate given their number and my training. Nonetheless, I asked that she not, because of my own caution, which approaches hypersensitivity.

You know the harsh reality that altered my approach to dealing with minors.

The scourge of pedophilia has afflicted the Catholic Church, USA Gymnastics, Penn State football and just about any endeavor or enterprise that involves children.

Before background checks and the screening of employees and volunteers became standard practice, my awareness of the issue accelerated when my son Don entered a Scout troop and I read "Scout's Honor: Sexual Abuse in America's Most Trusted Institution," a 1995 book by Patrick Boyle.

For too long, the Boy Scouts of America, not unlike the Catholic Church and other institutions, did not share knowledge of adult leaders who were guilty of abuse, allowing them to continue doing harm in neighboring communities and states.

Not every abused child becomes a pedophile, but it is likely that a pedophile was abused as a child. The psychological disorder is self-perpetuating. It's a universal problem that requires a universal approach – as well as a widening of the subject

matter.

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month, and sexual abuse is just one way in which society needs to be more vigilant about preventing, and healing, the damage being done to children.

Start at the very beginning, with the unborn, and the need for more pregnancy centers such as the one George Matysek wrote about **here**.

As Emily Rosenthal wrote **here**, the Archdiocese of Baltimore continues to emphasize best practices when it comes to providing a safe and secure environment in our schools and religious education classes.

The cause extends beyond campuses.

Those who turn a blind eye to the children who are victims of human trafficking; young refugees from Afghanistan or Syria; or the young ones among us who do not have ample food, clothing, shelter and education, contribute to their neglect.

You can help endangered children, by supporting agencies such as Baltimore-based Catholic Relief Services, with its international mission, and Catholic Charities of Baltimore, which keeps expanding its identification and treatment of childhood trauma, the foundation of dysfunction that leads to illiteracy, unemployment and addiction.

In our own homes, think back to the example of Sonda Staples, and the vital importance of monitoring and moderating a child's influences and interactions.