

Justin's Real Life experience

Hi, I'm Justin Barry. When I was 13, I began chatting online with someone who I thought was my friend. Before I knew it I was posing for pornographic pictures and video; doing things and meeting people I will regret for the rest of my life.

It all began so innocently, I obtained a web cam at 13 after obtaining a webcam from EarthLink.net. Within minutes of appearing on spot life I received an instant message from an adult male. This man I now know was a child predator; I did not understand that at that time. More predators followed; looking back today my thoughts seem foolish. But at 13 I believed these people were my friends. I was popular everyone wanted to know my thoughts, everyone wanted to give me things, I was king of my own universe. And all I had to do in exchange was strip and that's when everything changed.

One man approached me online with a proposal; he would pay me \$50 if I took off my shirt for a few minutes while sitting in front of my web cam. He explained how to set up an account on paypal.com, an online money payment system. Taking off my shirt seemed harmless; I did it at the pool. The money arrived and I took off my shirt. My viewers complimented me and it felt good. The weeks that followed are a blur but I now understand that by removing my shirt I signaled that I could be manipulated. More gifts and money arrived along with increasingly explicit requests. I felt like I was the one in control, it took me years to understand that the predators were instead controlling me. I didn't have a lot of close friends and I was very lonely. I hoped the webcam would help me meet other teenagers online, maybe even find a few girls my own age, but that never happened.

I'm telling you this because I want you to know that the internet is a wonderful place, but it can also crush your soul. I couldn't tell anyone close to me what was happening, I was too embarrassed. To dull the pain I started using drugs, and in the end I almost lost my life. All because I didn't understand the dangers of the internet. The internet is forever, if you put a picture of yourself doing something stupid on your Facebook people will still be looking at it on your 100th birthday. One of the things that upsets me to this day is knowing that the horrible and stupid things that I did on my webcam, were recorded for the rest of my life and it will be traded online by the predators. Think about who you're talking to, think about your future. For more cyber safety tips, log onto Attorney General Bill McCollum's safe surf website, safeflorida.net.