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"Hurt people hurt people" is a cliché that is often trotted out to explain situations such as these. I have come to really hate this saying because it implies that we are nothing more than products of our past circumstances. As Sam and Charlie have shown, we always have the choice to use our pain, not as a justification or an excuse, but as an impetus to support and safeguard others who are suffering similarly. Jerry Harris is clearly a hurt person but, as the government has pointed out, his status as victim does not represent a blank check to commit sex offenses against minors. His history, as tragic as it is, does not absolve him of responsibility for the countless choices, small and large, made over the course many years, as he relentlessly perpetuated a pattern of harm from his own life into the lives of children, seemingly either incapable of or unwilling to stop himself. Justice cannot be served in this case without a sentence that reflects the fact that, through Mr. Harris' persistent, brazen, consciously chosen, and carefully planned actions, he has effectively sentenced his victims to a lifetime of consequences.

By the same token, however, Jerry Harris and most of the boys he victimized have two things in common: First, seeking an escape from a world that judged them harshly for their sensitivity and their passion, they looked to the all-star cheerleading community as a place of safety, happiness, and belonging. Second, as it turns out, their trust in the cheer community was misplaced and they were harmed by the very adults who should have been a source of empathy, mentorship, and support. These boys and young men, including Jerry, were harmed, not just by the perpetrators of their abuse, but also by the individuals and entities that looked the other way and allowed their abuse to take place.

As much as Jerry has harmed my sons and his other victims and as heartbroken and angry as I am, I have to say that, even though he has been given a lengthy sentence, our family has absolutely no cause for celebration today. Every single aspect of this situation is tragic, including the fact that, just as he was about to make a remarkable escape from a history of poverty and hardship, Jerry Harris is instead headed for federal prison. The entities that control all-star cheerleading were eager to ride on his coattails when his celebrity status was drawing positive attention from all corners of the globe and bringing droves of new athletes to the sport. Now it is time for those same organizations to demonstrate an unequivocal commitment to the transparency, accountability, and substantive change necessary to prevent this from ever happening again.

– Kristen (mother of Sam and Charlie)