



East Lothian church elder placed on sex offenders register over inappropriate gift

The victim initially thought James Panton had gifted her a 'back massager' before learning the item's true purpose

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08:04, 7 AUG 2021

A church elder who gifted a sex toy to a young shop worker along with a card proclaiming she was “entering the full blossom of youthful womanhood” has been placed on the sex offenders register.



Panton outside the Sheriff Court in Edinburgh.

James Panton encouraged the woman, who is in her early 20s, that people should “enjoy our body at all stages of our lives” in a handwritten card delivered in a tote bag along with the device.

The victim, who cannot be identified, initially thought the item was a back massager before a colleague discovered the same object on sale on adult website LoveHoney.

She later informed her grandparents about the incident, who contacted police.

The victim told how retired biochemical scientist Panton, 61, came into her workplace before she started a shift to give her the gift.

They had previously spoken in a different shop.

Panton had written on the envelope she should open it in her “own personal and private space”.

The woman said she felt it was a “nice gesture” at first and later believed it was a “back massager”.

The trial heard the accompanying card read: “If you consider it inappropriate please place it in the bin.

“If you accept it with the respect and honesty with which it is given then I’ll be glad and that’s the end of it.

“It is unmistakable now that you are entering the full blossom of youthful womanhood and, in recognition of that as one human to another human, it’s important for us to reach out sensitively and honestly to encourage each other to reach the fullest of our

experiences as we explore who we are and to enjoy our body at all stages of our lives.

“We are all beautifully made.”

Giving evidence, dad-of-three Panton said he'd heard the woman had broken up with her boyfriend and thought she looked “quiet and forlorn” and was putting on weight.

He said: “I thought, I can't let a young woman like that sit and feel sullen in the prime of her life.”

Panton added: “I was trying to instil in her self-worth and raise her self-image.”

He bought the item of Amazon, the court heard, but denied the gift was aimed at giving him sexual gratification. Panton said the device could be used to massage “sore muscles” as it advertised but acknowledged knowing the device could be used for “sensual purposes”.

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Panton, a widower, added: “My problem is I'm a helper. I intervene.”

Later he told the trial: “At the time I thought (the vibrator) was suitable. I know now it wasn't.

“My heart felt I was doing the right thing. There was no perverted gratification sought. It was done with integrity.”

He told the court it was the “most stupid, impulsive thing I've done in my whole life” and his arrest and trial had left him a “hollowed man”.

Sheriff Adrian Fraser convicted Panton of communicating indecently with the woman by sending a card and package to her place of work which was of an indecent and sexual nature.

The sheriff deferred sentence on Panton, of Dunbar, East Lothian, for reports, including a psychiatric evaluation, until next month and placed him on the sex offenders register.

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