

The story of one man's abuse

Bill Tammeus | Dec. 14, 2011 A small c catholic

The [sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church](#) [1] has awakened many people -- even some bishops -- to the sickening realities of how this could happen. But just when we think we understand abuse, we hear another story that makes it clear our knowledge is insufficient.

That happened again to me recently when one of my readers (call him Dave) shared his story with me by email.

Dave, a man of faith but not a Catholic, is retired now but "was around 11 when the abuse first began, though the grooming had begun slightly earlier."

Because his brother was born with a developmental disability, "my mother was quite depressed. My dad didn't know how to deal with the situation and he pretty much emotionally left the family. Since we lived in a rural area I was kind of out on my own."

Into Dave's loneliness rode a perpetrator (not a clergyman) "on a white horse. He has money, he has position, he has respect in the community and he 'loves' me. Most of all he can from time to time take me out of a horrible situation. All he asks is a deep, dark secret."

Dave believes it's extremely difficult for perpetrators to get access to children "if the parents are involved in the child's life. Parents then as now become detached from their children for a number of reasons and when this happens it becomes very easy for a (perpetrator) to step in and fill the emotional gap the parents leave vacant."

Eventually, Dave says, he got "the feeling that things are not right. There are things going on here that shouldn't be going on or you wouldn't be asked to keep quiet about it. But the strange thing is you develop a very strong love/hate relationship with the (perpetrator) that never quite goes away."

"The relationship lasted four or five years until I became too old to interest him anymore. ... I do remember that toward the end of the relationship the physical part had become so revolting to me that I was unable to 'perform' no matter how hard I tried (and I worked at it diligently because I wanted to 'please him' above all other things). He told me that was 'all right' because it meant I wasn't gay and that was a 'good thing.'"

"When he left and moved on my reaction was to develop a hatred of 'gayness' in any form whatsoever. ... I got over it. I also developed a strong dislike bordering on hatred for the (perpetrator). No one could understand that. ... My mother, who suddenly had me around the house again, was especially upset that I was so 'ungrateful.'"

Dave hid his experience from himself and "didn't begin to deal with the feelings until I was in my fifties."

What were the effects? "Abuse will play hell with your future sex life in one way or another. ... I became about as repressed as it was possible to be and still reproduce for the next generation. To this day, on some level, I still feel that sex is one of those dirty things to be done in the dark with no one knowing that you actually do it."

"Abuse also plays havoc with your ability to trust anyone for any reason. ... You are always on guard, waiting to see what it is that they want. Despite many years of therapy, and ongoing 'maintenance' therapy, there is still a black door in my soul to a small, dark room where no one may go."

There was more, including Dave's feeling that people tend to blame the victim.

I wish every bishop would have to hear Dave tell his story unedited for as long as he wanted to. Some have heard such stories firsthand, but my hope is that once they looked Dave in the eye and recognized his perpetual residual pain, they would never again fail children under their care.

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