

Priest J

Although the majority of the sexual abuse victims who testified before the Grand Jury were male, the Diocese of Rockville Centre had its share of priests who abused young girls. (Grand Jury Exhibits 32, 146, 151, 155, 160) *Priest J* was one of these priests. He chose two sisters, both who were active in the parish school and folk group. The older one he began to sexually abuse at twelve; he raped her when she was fifteen. Their abusive, sexual relationship continued for years, finally ending after she was married at nineteen. Her sister's abuse also began at age twelve. Fortunately, *Priest J* did not rape her; the abuse was a pattern of continuous fondling and masturbation that occurred with the two of them undressed and *Priest J* lying on top of her. There was no penetration. The incidents occurred at school, often in the dark behind the school stage, in church behind the altar, in *Priest J's* room in the rectory and at the home of the girls before their parents arrived from work. The younger sister recalls trying to do her homework while her sister and *Priest J* were in her sister's room. She remembers that it was hard for her to concentrate although she did not really understand what was happening until *Priest J* began to sexually abuse her. As young girls the sisters never talked with one another about what was happening to them. However, they both tried in different ways to tell others.

The oldest girl first disclosed *Priest J's* abuse to a friend who told her that she was going to tell a nun. Soon after this conversation *Priest J* came to her and angrily asked if she had disclosed their relationship to anyone. When the girl acknowledged that she had, *Priest J* reacted by telling her that they were both going to be in, "really big trouble", if anyone found out, therefore, she should not say anything further about it to anyone. The elder girl spent a lot of time in *Priest J's* private rooms in the rectory but did not ever spend the night. Although the girl hoped that they would, none of the other parish priests ever asked her what she was doing there.

After attending the parish grammar school, the oldest sister went on to parochial high school. At one point she decided that she would tell the high school chaplain about *Priest J*. After she explained the history of his sexual abuse, including the fact that it had started when she was twelve, the school chaplain simply looked out his window and said, “Well, at least you have good taste. Get out.”<sup>47</sup> She fled. She never heard from anyone in any capacity at the school about *Priest J* after this incident. Later, when she was 21, she saw this priest again and told him that she was no longer a Catholic.

As an adult the younger sister told various people affiliated with the Diocese about her experiences with *Priest J*. First, when she was planning to marry she went to see about an annulment for her fiancée. The Deacon she spoke to was, in her words, “acting like a jerk”. Out of frustration she relayed her experiences with *Priest J*. She never heard anything from the Diocese and was later married in an Episcopal church.<sup>48</sup> In 1995 she was feeling guilty because she had never baptized her son. She went to see her parish pastor who had been an associate during the years she was abused by *Priest J*. She told him what *Priest J* did to her and to her sister. He said that he did not know how to help but offered to ask the Diocese about counseling. She never heard anything. Another time, at a wake, she met a priest who she had also known as a child. He said to her, “I’m sure if I asked you how you were you would tell me your lives were full of joy”. She replied, “Unfortunately, a certain person came into our lives and things changed” When asked if he knew who, this priest immediately said it was *Priest J*. The priest gave her his card and told her that if she needed anything she could call. By this time the girl

<sup>47</sup> Although this priest does have a recollection about a conversation about sexual abuse with a young girl, he denies reacting in the manner the girl says that he did.

<sup>48</sup> The Deacon was asked about this conversation in the Grand Jury. Although he recalled the meeting, he did not recall the disclosure of the sexual abuse.

knew that her sister had been in contact with representatives of the Diocese with respect to *Priest J* so she passed the card along to her. (Grand Jury Exhibit 123). Even after this conversation she heard nothing.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, the elder of the sisters had begun to try and get some assistance from the Diocese. She decided to retain an attorney who wrote a letter on her behalf. When there was no reply the lawyer wrote a second letter. Frustrated, and angry that she got no response, she contacted an organization that dealt with victims of clerical sex abuse. They referred her to another attorney, in New York, who specialized in these cases. Prior to contacting this attorney she made one last effort to contact the Diocese on her own. She went to her home parish to speak with a priest. None were available, so she decided to try a neighboring parish. There she met with a priest<sup>50</sup> who took copious notes of their conversation and gave her the name of a Diocesan administrative official that she should contact. (Grand Jury Exhibit 118). The priest told her that he was going to try to help her. He later sent a letter about their conversation to the victim's psychologist. She never heard from either the priest or the Diocesan administrative official.

A few months later, the victim met with her new counsel, who ultimately filed a civil lawsuit against *Priest J* and the Diocese. The Diocese was confident that the suit would be dismissed because the civil statute of limitations had lapsed. However, the Judge handling the matter told the Diocesan lawyers that the victim should be compensated for the unauthorized publication of the notes taken by the last priest she had met with. The Diocese offered \$5,000, and then \$20,000. Both of these offers were rejected. Representatives from the Diocese

<sup>49</sup> This priest acknowledged meeting the victim and speaking with her about her abuse. He did not doubt her credibility and was appalled by *Priest J's* conduct. However, because the abuse had occurred long before, he did not report it.

<sup>50</sup> Amazingly, the priest she spoke to was a child molester himself. The victim did not know this fact.

arrogantly reminded her that they owed her nothing for the sexual abuse and that she should settle.

As months turned into years, the woman and her husband tried to make the Diocese understand their position. Rejecting advice from their own attorney, and without his knowledge, they tried to get what they believed was just compensation from the Diocese. Time and again they tried to see the Diocesan officials responsible for the oversight of these matters. They were both literally and figuratively given the run around; they were sent to building after building at locations throughout the Diocese to find the priest everyone told them could help.<sup>51</sup> Despite their best efforts, he remained illusive. At one point the victim's husband met with a priest who worked in a Diocesan administrative position. Their conversation was memorable:

I said, you need to do the right thing for my wife. And I think you need to somehow, in anyway you can, compensate her for the loss of her life, basically and the problems that she has and will have. He said, under the law we don't have to do anything. He said, there is statute of limitations on these things and we are not obligated to do anything. And I said, you know, the Bible says if God's law exceeds the limitations of man's law as Christians you are supposed to obey God's law. I said, man might have created a law that limits, puts a statute of limitations on this crime, I said, that law doesn't nullify God's law. You still have to, if you are Christian, you need to obey that...You are now telling me that apparently you know this was a crime and it warrants punishment but because the law prevents it, you are happy to go off the hook? I said, I don't think that's right and he, he stuttered and stammered and I think he knew I was right and I was angry at that point and he knew it. I was very close to him and I was breathing on him, he was nervous and we sat there for a minute and I said, well what are you going to do for my wife? And he's I don't handle settlements. So I said, I was told you do. I was told you were the person to help people with this kind of thing and he said no. There is another Monsignor who is also a lawyer who handles settlements. So I said, Who is that? He told me (name omitted). Where is he? I can't tell you. He got very nervous...I can only give you a phone number. So I wrote it down on a piece of paper and I left...

They called the number and then wrote letters,

Sir, with all due respect, I and my family are both shocked and disheartened that you have not responded to my request for a person to person meeting with you as instructed by Monsignor (name omitted) two weeks ago. The request was sent through certified mail and I expected to receive a response from you by this time. The request I sent was for a person to person meeting with you in order to discuss an appropriate and fair settlement for the undue suffering I endured at the hands of one of your priests, (name omitted). I know that he was laicized and have a lawsuit of which I am sure you are aware. Therefore, I will spare both of us the horrible details. Over two years ago, I requested a hearing and help with medical care after suffering a near nervous breakdown and crying out to a nearby parish priest. He then published the details of my life and sent a copy to my psychologist and unfortunately, I do not know who else. This has left me more vulnerable to further heartbreak and unnecessary pain. I then had to deal with the embarrassment of a legal struggle which has caused greater anguish to myself and loved ones, as you might put it, "Precious children of God". I beg of you be fair and call upon God to give back to me was was so unfairly taken. (Grand Jury Exhibit 120).

Apparently, this last correspondence worked. Although no meeting ever took place, shortly after this last letter, she learned through her attorney, that the Diocese was offering \$100,000 to resolve the matter. A confidentiality and settlement agreement was executed, accompanied by a general release. (Grand Jury Exhibit 121). Almost five years had passed since the lawsuit had been filed.

<sup>51</sup> All of these years later, the victim still had the "Post-It" note on which she wrote the name and address of the priest she was looking for. (Grand Jury Exhibit 124).