

Torture and ritual abuse-torture:
Perpetrators who are “religious” men and/or women

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Preamble: In December of 2002 we met Kathleen via e-mail. Over the next year we collaborated and worked in partnership with Kathleen and her story “In God’s Name” is the outcome of such an important connection.



“In God’s Name”

Kathleen M. D. (October, 2003)

Dear Linda and Jeanne,

I say more to you than I would to most people. I do this because of the work you do and my desire to share with you my experience as a survivor of ritual and sexual abuse. While it is, as I am sure you know, helpful for me, I also hope that perhaps something I say may indirectly through you help another survivor feel less alone, weird and whatever else when you may be able to say to another survivor "oh yea, we know a survivor in the Eastern United States that also feels that way, or had that happen, or struggles with that." When others, including both of you, have done that for me, it helps "normalize what we are feeling for what we have experienced". In other words, it helps us to understand that many of the things we think and feel are normal for what we experienced even though the experiences were not "normal" ...

Well, here goes:

We were a very religious poor working class Irish family. I was the youngest of four children and the only one who never went to Catholic school. Being

Catholic was more of our identity than anything, with family being church and church being family. The type of Catholic we were included those who believed anyone who wasn't Catholic went to hell. This was a given, although it was not said out loud to non-Catholics. It was more like inside knowledge or like a secret that Catholics had. Also, saying it to someone who wasn't Catholic might result in being beaten up.

It was also a given that we were bad and could only hope that God would help us to be good...that God knew everything and saw our every move and that "He" would punish us for all the wrong and bad things we committed. That if we were lucky and didn't have a mortal sin on our soul when we died, we would make it to purgatory (no one ever made it to heaven without first going to purgatory...except if you were a saint). If you died and had a mortal sin on your soul but had not gone to confession you would go straight to hell, forever and ever to burn in the fire down there.

We were told that we could cut down on our time spent in the constant fire of punishment in purgatory if we read and/or did things the church called indulgences. For example, we were told that if each time you walked by a catholic church if you blessed yourself you were able to take off about 350 years worth of time spent in purgatory. I remember at one point being terrified because if one sign of the cross reduced your sentence by 350 years, how long did you get sentenced there. We blessed ourselves everyday and we still would have to be there for a long, long time.

Another thing that we were taught was that un-baptized babies went to Limbo which was described as this in-between place, not the endless fires of hell or the unimaginable length of time spent in the fires of purgatory, but not the joy and comfort of heaven either. We were taught that it was permanent separation from parents and family...total aloneness...just a bunch of babies floating around in nothingness. Of course all the other things associated with Catholics was also there too...nightly rosary, May processions, Holy Name Society, Knights of Columbus and the father of our family was also one of the men who did the "poor box" at mass each week.

There was a lot of physical, sexual, emotional and spiritual abuse in our family. Early on the incest that my father did to me, which started very, very young, was not so violent but as I got older he and it became more violent. At the point where he could no longer "safely" rape me, (i.e. or risk my becoming pregnant) he decided that he must, in God's name and for the glory of God, masturbate the

evil out of me. That was the last time I remember him sexually abusing me. I was about 13 or 14. To this day I still have no memory of when I actually began menstruating, something that almost every woman I know remembers quite well. I can only imagine that blood stains were so frequent for me that everything just blurred together.

My father was also a survivor of abuse. While I do not know the details of his abuse, I do know that he was thrown out of school in the fourth grade for fighting all the time and that it wasn't until adulthood that he was able to get on top of his stuttering that so limited him in his world. My father also abused his family and was the one who brought me to the church to be ritually, sexually and spiritually abused by a priest, two members of one of the churches organizations and himself. What I want to make clear, and what the poem below may help demonstrate, is that I could not separate the two...priest was father and indeed father, in many ways, was priest. They were one. They were right. They knew what was best. And they were the only ones that could make me worthy of God's love. I was being abused by both priest and father, father and priest...it was, I was told, for my own good.

"Peace Be With Who?"

"May the Peace of the Lord Be with you Always..."

And the sun shone through the stained glass windows, embracing statues, robes and people.

It was as if, while they knelt worshipping, praising and listening to "His" word, they were wrapped in a ray of holiness...

And that evening, as the sun began to set, she slowly crawled into his bed, for the "word" had said that God is Father and Father is God...

And that to be in "His" grace you must
"Honor Thy Father and Mother"

"The Mass Has Ended...Go In Peace"

And the penis became the exploding bomb,
And the semen the fall-out that could not be cleansed;

But the Red Cross did not come...

For there was no war...

There was no death...

There was no destruction

Just

"Our Father, who ar't in Heaven..."

"Remember O'Lord, Those who have Died...

May these...Find...Peace..."

And she still doesn't understand why death seems a viable alternative to life.

She has grown now...

Many things are good.

She knows that the scriptures and attitudes that say women must serve men...

That women are evil...

That women are responsible for everything, even death itself

Are not true...

Or, does she?

"May the Souls of the Faithfully Departed Rest in Peace" Amen!



I have briefly written about our family as a way to better understand the abuse I am now about to write about. But first, let me back up a little bit more:

It was in 1949 when I was 4 years old, that my father moved our family from the North Shore to the South Shore of a state on the Eastern seaboard. The move was a move away from all extended family to a place where none of us knew anyone and to a house that was considered to be on the "wrong side" of the tracks and in the "poorest section" of town. But, because of our Catholicism, we also felt very rich and this was a move to a community that had two Catholic churches (it now has three) and the place we lived was a short walk to one of them. This is the church my family referred to as "our parish," where communions and confirmations were made...where confessions were said and penances done. This is the church where girl scouts happened and one of my brothers was an altar boy and where both my sister and I, at different times, sang in the choir. This was the church that all the children were married in, some grandchildren were baptized in and the mother and father of our family were buried from. This is the church where my Catholic foundation was cemented, trusting that indeed priests were next to God and whatever they said was what I was to follow. That they were the ones who knew best how to help me be less sinful...less evil...and more worthy of God.

And so, when my father on two or perhaps three occasions, in the early fifties, took me by the hand and brought me to the church at a time when it was not Mass, not Brownies, not choir, not First Friday, not the paper drive, I

unknowingly walked towards the ritual, sexual and spiritual abuse by my church family, completing yet another generational cycle of violence. So horrific were the rituals, which included not only the sacrifice of my kitten and the rape of my young self but also were done in God's name by those I was taught were God-like, that I blocked the memory of them until about four years ago. But make no mistake, the memories may have been blocked, but the effects were not. What was done to me left me, among other things, imprinted with the belief that I was evil and that I should never have been born. And as bad as the other abuse was, this was different and more scary...it was in church and had other people involved and was done in "God's" name.

It was a Saturday night in the early fifties and the father came and took our hand and told the mother that we were going to church. This was before masses were held on Saturday nights. It was about five or six o'clock in the evening. The father seemed very mad and kinda scary and walked fast, pulling me along, not talking We stopped outside the church, not by the front doors but by the rear side doors. We waited and he kept looking all around. Then, all of a sudden, he pulled us into the church, down the cement stairs to the place where they had the children's masses on Sundays and also masses during the week.

When we got inside he brought me through another door into a room we never went into before. The room had a white hard rock table that was like marble and it was long and high and the legs were made out of the same thing as the table top was made out of. The room was all white and the altar like table had room all around it. He made us sit on the floor in front of the table and left. We didn't move.

We waited a long, long time sitting in front of the table looking up at it and then he came back and three other people in white robes with hoods on their heads walked through the door and stood behind the table looking at me. These robes looked like the robes the monks wore in Robin Hood. Daddy was there but we couldn't see him. We had to take off our coat and clothes and put something like a slip on. Men in robes started putting stuff on the table...bowls and pans and knife. It was scary...they didn't say words just put all this stuff on the table.

Then they went and got a box and reached into it and pulled out our kitty Snowball. She was a white kitty that we had found and she was kinda sleepy. Then they said some words about god and things for god and not for god and good and bad things...the man in the middle held Snowball up in the air and

stuck the knife into her...she cried loud...her blood went all into the bowl... she hang there in the man's hand and the blood kept going into the bowl and all over the place...then he laid her on the altar and cut parts of her out and put parts in the bowl and stirred them up with the blood...he held her up again like on his hand like a puppet and we could see her bones...then they made us drink and eat some of Snowball...then they made the slip come off us and laid us up on the very, very cold table and put some more of Snowball's blood on us and inside us through our private parts and covered us with her blood...it was coming out our mouth and we died and then we came alive again but we were tired a lot and we had blood over us and on our face too cause we could feel it and see it...there was so much red blood in the white room...it was on the robes and was on their shoes and was everywhere...and then one of them made us kneel down and bend over and hurt us in the bottom part...and somehow...one day...we were out playing again.

We knew we couldn't tell or we would die for good...we remember as a child praying for God to either make us a boy or to at least make us not be. We think that was the first time "God" helped us by making us not be. There were other times we were made "not to be" also...all of which we now understand helped us to survive. About three years ago we wrote the following poem:

It's Hard To Believe

It's hard to believe that wholeness is a possibility
When pieces of life have been cut dead, used in places not meant to be and
discarded who knows where
Justified in the name of god...for all that is holy...
to insure that which is right, just and good

It is hard to imagine that cleansing can ever come
From the internal and external blood stains embedded in the body, lined in the
brain,
trapping spirit from hopeful flight
Justified in the name of god...for all that is holy...
to insure that which is right, just and good
It is hard to think that healing can happen
When the smells, tastes, sounds and visions of violence and death live within
And the force of survival unreasonably, and not unoften, push on without
conscious desire

Maybe only when the spirit returns to where it began
will it know if it learned what it had come to learn and will it truly be cleansed
and whole,
able to rest in an unstained bed
wrapped in blankets of love, peace and hope



The journey of healing to wholeness is scary, painful and so hard. It is an aloneness that perhaps only another survivor can know and understand. But make no mistake, we survivors are learning that although we were powerless once, we do have power...that although we can be fragile at times, our strength is mightier than most can imagine...and that although our faith may have been broken, shattered and bloodied, many of us are discovering a spirituality of justice that frees our spirit and demands we advocate for the freedom of others. I wish each of you healing and release from the pain of your betrayal. And with the energy gained from your release, may you have the wholeness to seek and speak your truth and support and witness others as they speak theirs. You have just read about some of the pain and victimization of both clergy and father abuse...some of the effects...but right now, I want you read a little bit more...I want you to also read that we are more than just victims. Below is another poem I wrote. I wrote this one after hearing Maya Angelou speak one night...She spoke with such rhythm and strength and I wanted to capture that part of who I am also. I adapted the original poem and dedicate it to all survivors everywhere:

We Are More Than....

Listen!
We need to tell you something
Something maybe you haven't heard
with all the other stuff we've been telling you.
Something
maybe we've not felt...
only known...
till now.

ARE YOU LISTENING?

We are more than just victims...
you know all about that part of us...but...

did you know that we are more?

No longer do we try to rationalize...
minimize...legitimize...the events of our lives.

We used to...yes...that's true
but
WE SURVIVED!

And it's true some of us were immobilized...paralyzed...
terrorized...
for a long, long time
but
WE SURVIVED!

And while we know we will
again be victimized...
No longer do we have to analyze...sanctify...fantasize...
what is not...
FOR WE ARE!

WE ARE WOMEN
WE ARE MEN
Moving gracefully...deliberately...confidently...
where we walk.

Victimized.....YES Victim..... NO

WE ARE WOMEN AND MEN WHO SURVIVED!

~~~~~

And so, my healing into wholeness continues. Some days we can actually feel and claim our growth. Easter Sunday this past year I went back to where it seems to have all begun for me. I went back to the church where the abuse was done to me to speak my truth and in so doing, perhaps gained increased healing and freedom for both my father and myself. I took with me a vase of three purple and three white tulips and during Mass, placed it on the altar. The white tulips signified innocence and the purple tulips signified healing. Attached to the vase I left the writing below...a writing that included the hope that Easter

Sunday 2003 would be the beginning of change so desperately needed if the church is to become a place that truly honors the sacredness of all children and adults. A writing that was not only for my kitten and the parts of me that came to be in order for us all to survive, but also a writing to honor, recognize and remember all survivors and to proclaim that the abuse was not our fault, that it is good that we told and that the shame is not ours! For now, I will close with that writing along with the wish that each of you be able to speak your truth and witness for others as they speak theirs.



### **In Honor, Recognition and Memory**

These flowers are left here in honor and recognition of those of us who, however differently, survived the sexual, spiritual and in some cases, ritual abuse done to us at this church and in the churches around the world by those priests who we were taught were next to God...by those priests who proclaimed to be next to God...and by all those we should have been able to trust.

These flowers are left here in memory of those who did not survive...for those who were sacrificed immediately and for those whose experiences were so shattering for who they were that they eventually were unable to live in a way that would sustain and be conducive to life.

These flowers are left here in the hope that like the resurrection of your Christ, the resurrected voices of we survivors will help other survivors resurrect their voices and that they will then begin to feel less alone, less evil, less unworthy of life...less able to speak their truth.

These flowers are left here in hope that like the resurrection of your Christ, the resurrected voices of we survivors will help lessen the abuse now happening and of the abuse that will occur in the future if change and accountability does not happen.

These flowers are left here in the hope that like the resurrection of your Christ,

the resurrected consciousness of those in your church who no longer deny, rationalize or minimize the horror, silence and secrecy of our victimization will spread to you all and that with your new consciousness the victimization will lessen, not only for the children and vulnerable adults, but for those who perpetrate these horrific crimes as well.

These flowers are left here in the hope that like the birth of your Christ the church that it said it was will finally be birthed and it will become a role model for both it's members and the members of the secular community as well.

And finally, these flowers are left here in the hope that a new commandment may be added to the existing ten...one that commands the honoring of children and of the vulnerable...one that commands that people recognize their power and that they commit to using it in ways that support and nurture the collective rather than the few...one that commands that those who abuse their power are held accountable...one that commands that the children be protected and the vulnerable be given power...one that commands and recognizes that the crimes against the children and vulnerable have been and continue to be crimes against your Christ and your God.

Let this Easter Sunday, April 20, 2003 start the change so needed. It was not our fault, it is good that we told and the shame is not ours.

Kathleen M. D. (one of many who survived)



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