

Christmas, 1984

Dear Joan and Jack;

Merry Christmas. I had hoped to be able to get together with you before this great feast, but I guess that was not meant to be. I have spent these many months praying for a chance for healing. I know that, for the Christian, time does not heal all things; only reaching out for healing and understanding does. Since April, when Dan said "things were over" I have wanted to reach out to Dan and to others, but I could'nt, mainly because Dan said not to, and told me that noone else was concerned. Because I had a relationship of confidence with him, I had to trust that silence and have struggled through these months with much pain. The silence has been deadly and I know how many others are suffering. I wanted to reach out and touch the circles of pain in our families especially. I felt very helpless because I did'nt want to intrude, especially if he thought I was trying to "force a reconciliation." I decided to trust the silence and give him the space he needed and the support of others around him. I couldnt ask anyone about him or get in his way at all, but I havent stopped caring and praying. When Janie asked to see me and to talk, I reached out because I was'nt intruding but responding to someone else. After the beautiful time with her, and we listened to each other, I realized that things were not healing at all. The pain and brokenness was getting worse in Dan, and everybody else. I knew that I had to try, even against Dan's wishes. That's why I called you, why I tried to reach out to him.

I write this letter to you to try and cross some of the distance. This letter may be a little selfserving, but it's as honest as I can be. I need your forgiveness and understanding. I love your family very much, and would have preferred to see you and say these things personally, because I know how oppressive letters can be. But I have to try to reach out somehow because I can't be myself without believing in healing. I have'nt been able to offer Eucharist all this time without wanting to make peace with all my heart, and waiting, hoping for Dan to open up, or for the chance to say something to those I love.

It's what my life is all about. Even more, I know that Dan will never be whole until healing takes place. The relationship we shared centered on the Eucharist, and we have to find a way to peace. Please try to understand my silence these months. Dan told me to get out of his life, and that meant getting out of others lives too, until he was ready. I havent spent a day without crying when I think of those I love; and know that I can't be priest to the Donohue family, which means so much to me. Not to be present to those I love is like dying, but that's what Dan said to me; "You're dead." No talk, no understanding, just that, and all my prayer moments since then have tried to find a way to talk, to see the people I love and want to be at peace with. Somehow the circles of pain have to lessened, and the distance between us has to be shortened, otherwise evil wins. I leave it to the Lord to complete the work of healing between Dan and I. I know it will happen in His time. All I can do is reach out to you, because something has to be done.

I am enclosing a note Dan wrote to me about eight months before his April letter. I send it to you to let you know how personal, spiritual and special our friendship was to us. It was one that always centered in prayer and in mutual trust. That note was written long after some of the things that Dan raised in April, so I know that something had to happen since then to change his feelings. I could'nt understand how such a relationship that meant so much to both of us, could go from such openness to the violence and pain present now. It's almost like two different people wrote them. It devastated me.

All last year I saw Dan struggling, and he was often very rude to me but I just tried to understand him and be present. I saw him closing himself off, and tried to talk but he wasn't listening. I asked him often if I had hurt him, because friends had to push through hurt and misunderstanding to mutual understanding, but he said nothing was wrong. Dan just withdrew, and, in many words, told me to get lost. What frightened me was that he was not praying as he did, and when I tried to talk to him as spiritual director about it, he avoided it. He then told me that I was no longer his Spiritual Director. I knew that that was not the problem and told him that something larger was going on, but he really never let me talk to him about it. I said that I felt uncomfortable that things were being decided about me without any dialogue, and that changing spiritual directors is something to be seriously talked about. Dan said, that's it. We're still Friends Father, we always will be". I said I'd rather be priest to him than his friend." If we couldn't pray together, what's left. Dan got very busy with the play, and we hardly saw each other, and then came the letter in April. Needless to see that crashed in on me like nothing else in my life. I was very frightened. I had to go away. I made a weeks retreat trying to sort through the violence of that moment and what it meant for my life. Here was the closest human friendship, and the deepest spiritual relationship of my life, and, without a word spoken, any listening or dialogue, I was told that I don't exist any more. I had to ask myself radical questions. "Is that what I am?" "Is that what six years of honest and caring friendship said?" Are things over because of a letter, or feelings, or pain?" "Have I really been someone who abused a friend and took advantage of someone I loved so much?" I had to ask very hard questions of myself about my motives, my life, my goodness, my ministry, because someone I respected very much, my dearest friend struck out so. I love Dan so very much, and said, "if that's what he sees, then I have to wrestle with the questions. Can I have caused so much pain?" His letter was a grace for me because it made me deal honestly with important questions; who I was as a man, a friend, a priest.

Dan's letter said that I was someone who treated him like a child. I was always trying to tell him what to do. I never understood him or listened to him. Even when he asked me important questions, I didn't answer him as he wanted. He said "things had changed", and "It's over" He said he had new friends that I knew nothing about, and that he didn't want to see me or speak to me again. Then he mentioned the "touching" incidents which took place two years before. I spent the week on retreat and much of the time since trying to understand all that. I know in my heart that I never treated Dan as a child. I opened my life to him and trusted him as an equal. I saw his prayer, his asking me for time, his desire to grow in the Lord as so mature that I trusted him with confidences. Maybe one mistake was expecting such maturity from someone so young, because it demanded so much of him. I knew that I was a good spiritual director and had pushed him to be very honest about his spiritual growth and his being in seminary. I saw him grow so much when he gave himself to prayer. When he raised the touching gestures and moments of two years past, I was very threatened by it. As I looked back on them they were times that threatened Dan much. Dan and I used to hold hands and embrace each other often. It wasn't planned, but just became something we did. We would put our arms around each other and say how much we cared for and loved each other. Dan was very warm in the things he said and wrote and it didn't seem threatening at all. I never touched Dan or, He me, genitally, and I never saw it in terms of sexual activity. I had tried to tell him when we talked about it back then, that there was a difference between gestures of intimacy between close friends and sexual activity that was sinful. I told him that I didn't see them as wrong

but that they were very unimportant. They had'nt been thought out and they would never happen again. They were moments i had'nt focused on at all. Obviously, challenged by what Dan said, Those moments must have been very confusing and threatening, and very unfair to someone I care for so much. I should have known better and never allowed anything like that to surface. I never saw the larger fears for such a situation. Dan and i had talked very honestly about ourselves and our feelings and i never saw anything as a threat. He knew me as someone who would always struggle to be honest with him, and with the Lord. I cant tell you the pain I feel for any brokenness in those moments, for any hurt I may have caused to my friend. I'm sorry for the selfishness, thoughtlessness, the demeaning and confusing moments, I will live all my life with the pain I may have caused. When I look back on those moments, I see the danger there, but i dont see myself as sick or wierd or cruel. I've been a priest for twenty years and lived a caring and open ministry, and been faithful. I feel good about much of the struggle. When Dan rushed into my life I let him him closer than anyone else. He demanded time and interest, and I would often ask him about that, and say that all that time would cost me too. I let many defenses down and became very fragile, because i saw our relationship as always involving prayer and honesty. I knew that we would be ok if we kept the Lord in Focus. I look back on much more than those moments. There's more to me, to Dan . to our friendship.

Dan mentioned something else in the letter that bothered me because ~~we~~ had never mentioned it and he read something else into it/ Dan mentioned that he saw me peeking at him when he slept in my room. Boy, (I wished he talked about that.) When Dan lived in the Ford House, he would always make a private visit to the Blessed Sacrament, before retiring. That was sacred to him and the key to his growth as a person. Last year, when he would come in to stay over night, i noticed he was struggling with prayer. I used to hope and pray that he would go down to chapel. I'd watch to see if he make the visit. Sometimes I actually went down the back way to visit the Lord for him. I stayed awake and prayed for him and checked if he would go. I know that was silly, but it was so important. Later in the year, when Dan was avoiding me, he'd come in to the house, and say he was tired. I'd go in the back, and Dan would sit up and watch tv in my room. I felt he was being curt, and pushing me away, and often just sat up wondering why Dan was so distant. I used to check and see if he was still up as I could'nt sleep and knew he was telling me to get lost. I used to get up early and walk out to see when he was getting up so we could get some time together before he took off in the morning. It was crazy, but I was trying to hold on to something that was slipping away. I often said that to Dan. I said, that unless we take the time to look at ourselves we're letting too much die.

It's tough to watch people die. I felt so helpless these months because i could see what was happening but could'nt do anything. Probably the most shocking thing about all this to me was how much pain people who love each other can cause. Also our relationship was so alive in the Spirit, that even if all Dan felt was true, I cant believe that we could understand and trust and forgive. It's what we always expected of each other.

All these months, I've prayed for my friend. I tried to understand all I knew but something was missing. It did'nt seem to make sense. I knew that something else must have intruded. I'm the same person i've been all these six years. I'm the same person Dan wrote the other note to. I was a good friend and priest. I also knew that no one grew as much as Dan and I did during the time we shared at the Prep. It was'nt until the end of the summer that pieces came together.

The first thing was that i figured that someone else had intruded a while back as an adviser to Dan that made me no longer needed or helpful. I had noticed that but had'nt refered to it. Now I saw how my advise was'nt what he wanted to hear. The second thing I found out in september when i learned that Dan had been going with a girl since early in the year. That answered a lot of things, and I did'nt feel as guilty as I had. Now, I knew why Dan did'nt want me as a spiritual director. Now I knew why he saw those gestures in the past, as very oppressive. Now I knew why he kept pushing me out, and had said "things have changed." Now I knew what "new friends" meant. Now I knew why he was struggling with prayer and with school. I had tried to tell him that such an emotional involvement would tear him, and he had to be honest about what he thought the Lord asked of him. Dan's life was all one piece, and if he pulled in different directions he'd crumble. (I told him that if he had to search out feelings and a desire to date, not to do it in the seminary.)

What bothers me and frightens me so much is that anything which makes a person less forgiving, less aware of others, less prayerful, less concerned about others needs can't be what God asks of our lives. Dan was the most gentle, most aware and sensitive person I ever knew. When Janie spoke of Dan's suffering now, (and Joanie wrote the same thing) When I see all the pain around as he closes himself to people who love him, I know the it was ^{not} our friendship that was the problem. I once told Dan as we shared spiritual journeys that he had a great call to holiness. Much more than you and I do. His journey was always one of surrender to the Lord, and when he did, he grew. I saw a level of temptation in his life that only saints go through. Dan's is a heart struggle to surrender his life and will to Jesus, and real temptation comes by feeling you have to "be free". Things and people who were important become training because they "tie you down". That's why Dan after pushing so many people away, does'nt seem nearer to peace inside himself. That's why people who love him can't get close.

I know that this note has rambled, and maybe i don't know what i'm talking about. I had to pour all this out somehow. I know the typing stinks, but the sentiments of my heart are very real and sincere. I love Dan so much. I cherish his friendship and want to see him grow so much. I say the rosary and make a visit for him every day because I know the Lord has a special place in His heart for him. I am probably going to be assigned to Washington D.C. for three years soon, and to think that I cannot heal some of the brokenness around is horrible. I'm trying, I will always keep trying. Please forgive me any moments of failure. Know I love Dan. Know I love your family. Know my family loves Dan and you all, and misses him very much. Know that this good, kind friend and priest, who loves his Church and his priesthood prays each day for healing and for those he loves. Know that this pain I feel has made me a better priest and man, because it has made me a wounded soldier and "in Love's service only wounded soldiers will do" Know that I need to be healed and ministered too, and only God's people can do that. Know that my first prayer each morning and last prayer each night is, "Lord, take care of my friend"

Please accept this letter in Love Until we can see each other again.

Fr. Karan