

Priest in abuse case dies, and few notice

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Whenever the television in Edna Cole's apartment got temperamental, she knew who to call: the guy next door. He could fix almost any appliance. Ray Pcolka had a knack for mechanical things. It's people who vexed him.

Just ask any of the scores of girls and altar boys, now grown up, who accused him of sexually abusing them from the start of his career as a cleric in the 1960s through the 1980s. They lodged complaints with the Diocese of Bridgeport for years, only to see them swept under the rug, discounted as Pcolka moved from parish to parish, where his creepy pedophilic past would be unknown.

Pcolka stood at the epicenter of a series of lawsuits filed by those who claim he preyed upon them in church, at rectories and at his New Hampshire vacation home.

Eight days before the Diocese of Bridgeport, acting in response to a court order, released more than 12,000 sealed files that document how it handled its investigation of priests sexually molesting kids, on Nov. 22, Pcolka died at 1:15 a.m., at the Glen River Nursing Home in Southbury. His body was cremated a few days later at the Pine Grove Crematorium in Waterbury.

What? You didn't know? You missed the obit? That's understandable. There wasn't any -- not a single obituary. Perhaps that's how Pcolka wanted it -- to leave this earth with no fanfare whatsoever. After all, he had attracted enough attention.

Pcolka was born in May 1939, the eldest of Stephen and Mary Anna Pcolka's two sons. Apart from some summer jobs, the only career he

ever had was as a cleric. He was ordained in 1965, after completing his seminary training, and relieved of his priestly responsibilities in March 1993, three months after his mother revised her will for the last time. He died of liver failure, cirrhosis and chronic hepatitis C.

Pcolka was defrocked by the diocese in 2004, nearly nine years after he was removed from his parish. The multimillion dollar lawsuit the diocese settled with 23 plaintiffs who alleged they were sexually abused left Pcolka in deep debt. In 2001, he filed for bankruptcy protection from his creditors, whom he owed \$164,503.73. The largest of those debts -- \$90,000 -- was to the Diocese of Bridgeport, presumably for his personal litigation expenses. The rest was credit card debt.

In his bankruptcy petition, Pcolka disclosed that his income was \$1,828 per month. During one of his depositions, he acknowledged that those earnings represented his pension from the diocese. Around that time, he moved in with his mother when she left Trumbull for the exclusive Heritage Village, an enclave of modern, yet rustic-looking condos nestled around a golf course and four pools in Southbury. It's a place where tap-dancing classes, morning aerobics and power walks are de rigueur. It's a bucolic place that looks a lot like paradise for active senior citizens.

"He mostly kept to himself," Pcolka's longtime neighbor Elizabeth Giacomazzo says. "He was a homebody who was very devoted to his mother. He was always taking her to doctors and other appointments, anywhere she needed to go."

Giacomazzo, like many of Pcolka's neighbors, recollected his closeness to his elderly mother, a widow, whom he lived with. When she died in 2005, she left a will in which she cut him out of any share of her estate. "My failure to provide for my son, REV. RAYMOND S. PCOLKA, although intentional, is not due to any lack of love or affection for him," she states in the will, which she signed on Jan. 20, 1993, before the first lawsuits against Pcolka were filed.

Her estate was worth \$116,180.76, all of which she left to her younger

son, Robert, who sold his place in Trumbull and moved into Heritage Village with his wife. Pcolka moved out.

From time to time, Giacomazzo would see him. "He came up to visit for the holidays; Easter, Christmas and Thanksgiving." Giacomazzo saw Pcolka's brother days ago. "I'm so sorry," she says. "He was a nice guy. We'd always ask how he was. I saw his brother a week ago and we were talking about our condos and he didn't say anything about him passing away. Nothing. I wish I'd known."

Nothing about his low-key existence later in life changes the fact that he was a monster, a man who abused the trust of children and ruined lives.

Efforts to reach Pcolka's relatives were unsuccessful. They did not return phone calls or messages left at their condominium.

At the Davenport assisted-living apartments in Hamden, Pcolka kept to himself. Several neighbors who say they knew him well had no idea he had ever been a priest or why he had left the clergy.

In recent years, he was in and out of hospitals, one neighbor says of Pcolka. Another, Elaine Marreiros, recalls him being "very considerate" of other residents, and a "total gentleman."

Edna Cole, a next-door neighbor, refers to him as Mister Fix-It.

"My television is always breaking," Cole says. "I'd call him and he'd come over and work on it. He never seemed to mind. And I'd call him a lot. He always got it working again. It's a shame, him dying. People who know him will miss him."