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# 3 Weeks Ago I Revealed I Was Abused By A Priest. Here's How It Changed My Life.

If I had known how much publicity I would receive, I might never have considered speaking out. But I'm glad I did.

By Ed Hanratty, Guest Writer

Sep 17, 2018, 08:30 AM EDT



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About two years ago, my wife and I sat in our local pub during happy hour, lamenting the dwindling days of our 30s. A casual acquaintance who had recently turned 50 offered us a bit of wisdom: "Your 40s will be the best days of your lives. Everything comes together and you start to figure it out."

To me, this sounded like a well-meaning attempt to make a bad situation seem better than it really was — the same way people will tell you that money can't buy happiness, or that being crapped on by a bird is good luck.

But, as it turned out, she hit the nail on the head.

For the last 30 years of my life, I had been carrying a psychological burden that only recently began to truly present itself to me: I was sexually abused

3 Weeks Ago I Revealed I Was Abused By A Priest. Here's How It Changed My Life. | HuffPost HuffPost Personal  
by my parish priest while I was an altar boy in the late 1980s.

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Ed Hanratty's First Communion photo, 1985. COURTESY OF ED HANRATTY

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I had always been aware on some level that something wasn't right. Like many other people, I had seen the reports about Catholic clergy abuse.

Reading those stories, I would think to myself, *Well, I never had it that bad* — as if there were a certain degree of child molestation that could be considered acceptable. In my youth, I shoplifted cigarettes, but I never stole a car. I drank when I was still underage, but I never drove drunk. I compartmentalized my abuse in a similar fashion. *I was pinned down while a priest made out with me, but he never ripped my pants off.*

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### The What What: Your Tinder Pro Tip of the Week



It wasn't until I read the [Pennsylvania Grand Jury](#) report released last month on the decades of clergy abuse in the Commonwealth that I realized parts of it read like my own autobiography. I found stories of survivors whose experiences mirrored mine. I read about the psychological ramifications they suffered, and realized that I too had been carrying around this burden for so long, it had affected every aspect of my life. I had experienced substance abuse. Intimacy issues. Anxiety.

Depression. A disdain for any semblance of authority. A failure to believe that I deserved, or was good enough for, almost anything.

Worst of all, I had kept the details from my wife, my friends and my family — all of whom at one point or another have dealt with the aftershock of those manifestations.

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That's when I knew I had to get everything off of my chest — that I would never be able to fully get on with the back nine of my life until I came to grips with what I had been through.

I'd guess that most people in my position would speak first to their loved ones and then to a psychiatric professional. For better or worse, I decided to go in a different direction. I felt that if just one person who grew up in my parish learned my story and came to the same realization that I did, maybe they too would be able to gain some perspective on any issues they were facing. I had also recently learned that the priest who abused me was still working at a parish with a school. I hoped that by going public, I would be able to alert that church and its parishioners and have him removed from his position.

I have been fortunate enough to write freelance news and opinion pieces for Reverb Press, an independent political site, for the last two and a half years. I spilled my guts to the editors and told them I wanted to write about my experiences on Reverb.

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## **parts of it read like my own autobiography.”**

The editors were concerned with my well-being above anything else. They treated me like a brother, not an employee. They wanted to make sure I could emotionally handle what might happen if I shared my experiences in such a public way. To be honest, I wasn't totally sure how I would react once my story was out in the world, but I told them I wanted to do it.

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I discussed what happened to me and my decision to come out about it with my wife, and she couldn't have been more supportive. She had only one (quite reasonable) condition before I wrote my piece: I had to tell her my full story before she read about it on her phone.

I knew that if I couldn't handle this request, I wouldn't be able to deal with anything else that came my way. So I told her. I got choked up. She cried. And eight hours later, on a sunny Sunday morning, [this was published](#).

I had no idea what to expect.

You don't hear many men speaking out about being sexually abused. No matter how open-minded, liberated or progressive I may claim to be, it doesn't change the fact that I grew up with the “boys will be boys” ethos of the late 20th century, in a testosterone-fueled society of pervasive

misogyny and not-so-subtle homophobia. We weren't supposed to cry, let alone broadcast our vulnerability.

I knew I would have the support of my good friends and family. I knew many casual social media friends would understand. But what about everyone else? How would they react to this burly, bearded [Facebook](#) loudmouth making such a naked admission? And what about my hometown? Was I kicking up dirt that was better left settled? Was I upsetting the apple cart in a community where my in-laws still reside?

My fears were put to rest almost instantly. My story spread through social media circles in my hometown of Ridgefield Park, New Jersey, like wildfire. I was bombarded with Facebook messages from names I hadn't even thought about in three decades. The response was unanimously positive.

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And I received more than one message like this:

“Ed, I don't know if you remember me, but I was an altar boy with you and went through the same thing with Father Gerry. Never told anyone.”

That message alone (with a gentleman I'm now in daily contact with) proved to me that I made the right decision. But it didn't end there.

It turns out, everybody remembered Father Gerry. Everyone knew something was amiss. Some people had very strong suspicions. Some had heard disturbing stories. Some were personally abused. Two families lost

loved ones due to the aftermath of his abuse. But nobody ever said anything. And I understood why. Because it took me 30 years. Those who even hinted at impropriety back then were shunned. The parish engaged in victim-shaming. And our church was the cultural epicenter of the town — counting teachers, police officers, first responders, mayors and councilmen among its members.

Once people got wind that the abuser was still an active priest who worked with students at a school, shock turned to outrage. The parish — less than 12 miles away from Ridgefield Park — was bombarded with telephone calls and emails. Officials soon had to turn off the comments on their Facebook page.

A group of women who dubbed themselves the “Relentless Bitches” led the charge to see this man removed from his position. They called the archdiocese. They called the county prosecutor. A detective from the county’s special victims unit called me seeking to verify my account before he confronted church authorities.

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By Wednesday of that week, a protest had been organized at the church for the following Sunday. By Friday, it was unnecessary: Father Gerry Sudol was removed from his position. A church investigation into his abuse had been reopened. My story was passed along to the archdiocese and to law enforcement. The church even contacted my wife to let them know they would welcome my statement. (I have no reason to trust the motivations or methods of the church, and they have no authority over me. My formal



statements to the prosecutor's office, I have been told, will be sent to the archdiocese for any of their proceedings.)

**“I’ve realized that I am not a victim, but a survivor. The alpha males who I once thought would mock me if they knew the truth have been among my biggest supporters. For the first time in my life, I feel like I’ve charted a course.”**

Suddenly, I was being interviewed by [NJ.com](#) and on air [with the NBC affiliate in New York City](#). Anyone in the New York metropolitan area, population 20 million, might now know that I was sexually abused as a child. There was no hiding it anymore. If I had known just how much publicity my experience would receive, I might never have considered sharing it.

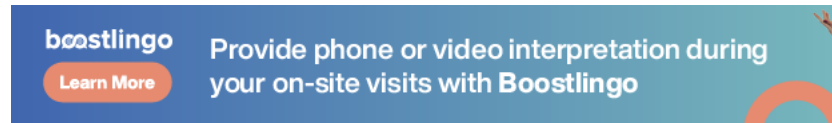
And that's why I'm glad I had no clue.

My neighbor — a Teamster in his late 50s who's easily the biggest ballbuster I've ever known — was one of the “alphas” I was really hoping to avoid once the news broke. As I said, it's still hard to shake that archaic “man code” from time to time. The first time I saw him after the story went live, he came into my driveway, extended his hand and said, “That was a great [expletive] story! That took some guts. I hope you bring these bastards to justice.”

Less than two weeks after I published my piece, the states of New Jersey and New York announced they were following Pennsylvania's lead and starting a criminal investigation into clergy abuse and the Catholic church's response. I know our Facebook group of 380 members wasn't the driving factor in this decision, but I'm confident that we kept this story in the

headlines long enough to give political leaders the cover to take on the world's oldest running organization.

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My wife and I have laughed a lot in the three weeks since I opened up about my sexual abuse, which leads me to believe my general demeanor has changed. It was not an intended consequence, but it's incredibly welcome — as are my lower blood pressure and better sleeping habits.

I've realized that I am not a victim, but a survivor. The alpha males who I once thought would mock me if they knew the truth have been among my biggest supporters. For the first time in my life, I feel like I've charted a course. Where exactly the final destination will turn out to be, I don't quite know. But seeing a community of people who haven't been in touch for decades suddenly rally as we came to grips with our not-so-secret secret has restored my faith in humanity in these often dystopian times.

Channeling the anger I've harbored against the church into a productive and unyielding demand for full accountability and justice has turned out to be my lifelong mission — I just never knew it.

I guess life really does begin at 40.

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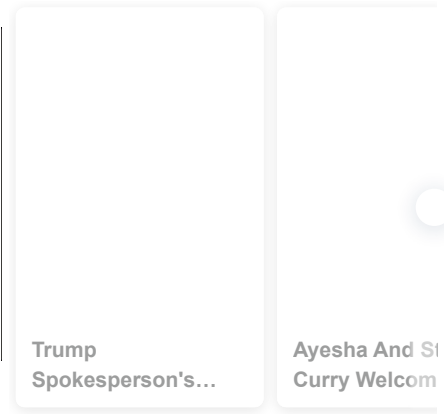
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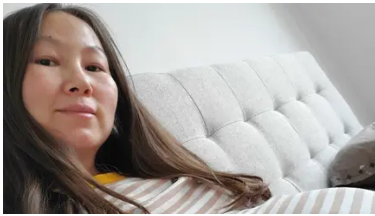
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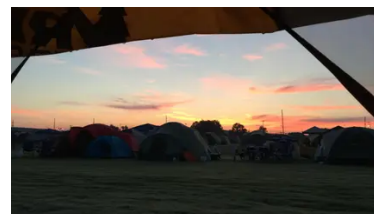
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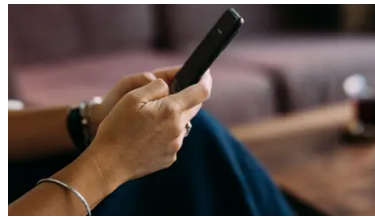




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