

To Help a Survivor Heal, Letters were Written and Sent to their Abuser

February 11, 2021

https://www.snapnetwork.org/letters_sent_lauinger_detroit_feb21

In the cold winter of 2020, one of SNAP's board members was contacted by a survivor with whom she shared a sad connection: decades ago, while students at different schools in the metropolitan Detroit area, they had been abused by the same priest.

This survivor, who we will call Jane, connected with SNAP leader Judy Larson to share her story and her plan of action that she thought was critical to her healing. The priest who abused her, **Richard Lauinger**, was 90 years of age and living quietly in Nevada. Jane wanted this priest to know how his actions affected her, and so she and Judy decided they would write letters, detailing the abuse and the affects that it had on them, and send those letters to Lauinger.

Jane and Judy wrote their letters, enclosed a photo of themselves at the time they were abused, and sent their letters off to Lauinger. Neither woman cares about Lauinger or his response, but Judy said that "[Jane] thanks me for listening to her and helping her along her healing journey. And she has helped me and we have validated the truth with each other."

Read a copy of each woman's letter below:

Judy



1/28/2021

Richard Robert Lauinger,

Yes, I know your full name. You most likely don't recognize the 10 year old girl in this picture. She remembers you, she identified you in a photo lineup 59 years after you sexually assaulted her numerous times in the old farmhouse Our Lady of Sorrows Parish used for a rectory. Your crimes have been seared into her memory because of the cruelty and selfishness you perpetrated. You were presented to the people of the parish as a special representative of god, not a mere man, but a transformed, exalted being because you were ordained a Catholic priest. How wrong the parishioners were to believe you were "special", as you repeatedly told me I was. You are a criminal, a pedophile, a soul murderer of children.

In 4th grade the nuns of Our Lady of Sorrows Grade School taught us that it would be better to die than to lose our "virtue." "Lose our virtue" was never explained, it just sounded terrible if it were better to be dead than this. Then, in 5th grade, without permission, and with disregard for the effects on your victim, you stole my "virtue" from me. I didn't know what your actions were called because sexual crimes were not explained to me until I was much older. I just knew that what you did hurt and was ugly, something I hated, something I quit Girl Scouts in order to avoid you taking me from the parish hall next door to the rectory. I suspect Pastor Beahan knew what you were up to, and just looked the other way. Some of the nuns figured it out and admonished you to leave some of the young girls alone.

Two scriptures come to mind, since you were a supposed "man of god." The one that says if a man hurt a child it would be better that a millstone be hung round his neck and he be

drowned in the sea. The other says that god is mindful of his children, even as he is mindful of a sparrow falling to the ground. I figured I wasn't as important to him as a stupid bird, so I was nothing, forgettable, expendable, something to throw away. Many times I wished someone had hung a millstone around your neck and thrown you into the sea to drown.

Your actions stole my innocence and much of my potential. I wanted to be a mother, but I couldn't conceive because of what you did to me. I lived in fear of someone finding out my "dirty" secret and rejecting me, so I overachieved, people pleased, held a pain in my gut lest someone see me. I believed I didn't deserve love, a college degree, a good job, to be happy. I suffered nightmares, flashbacks, and triggers when I was in a location similar to where you assaulted me, an office, a bathroom, or in the presence of a roman collar. I never trusted a person of authority again because of your betrayal.

You told me that if I told what you had done to me no one would believe me. Because my parents were such devoted Catholics, I believed that I would be beaten with a belt until I admitted what I said you did was a lie. They died not knowing what a monster you are. I believed you for 58 years. Then I spoke my truth, and I was believed, even by the police. I am a SURVIVOR. I know one of your victims who couldn't live with the pain and killed herself, one of my classmates.

I have become an advocate for victims of sexual trauma, because that helps me heal from your crimes and gives me a sense of purpose. I want to leave the world a better place than I found it. Nothing you could ever do would compensate for the harm you have done to unnumbered innocents. You are a pariah, an emotional leper, and as of 2016, the world knows what a worthless human being you are. When your name is spoken in many places in Michigan, people say you were a creep, I tried to avoid him, I didn't want to be around him. In every parish you served you left chaos and pain, what a sad legacy. I don't

believe you feel remorse for the harm you caused, I do believe you consider yourself a victim of those who spoke the truth and uncovered your crimes. When you die, your victims who hear of it will rejoice and feel a sense of relief.

Jane

Richard Lauinger,

You and I met decades ago. I was a student/parishioner at St. Eugene School/Church in Detroit. I am sure my face would not evoke any memory or feeling in you. I am sure my face would in no way be familiar. Yet I can remember your face as clearly as if I saw you yesterday. I can remember your height. How I was so small that you had to bend way down to talk to me face to face. Your face always inappropriately close to mine. I can hear your voice and the romantic tone you reserved for moments when no one else was around. Speaking “sweet” words or singing softly to an audience of one. A child seven years of age.

I will not go into the details of what you did to my body. We both know what you were capable of. Even at a young age I knew that what you were doing was wrong.

St. Eugene was part of my neighborhood. Their playground was a place to enjoy my childhood innocence. To be carefree. You stole that from me. Since making your acquaintance, I would go to that playground, but I always kept an eye on the doors of the building. Waiting for you to come out so that if you did, I could run as fast as my little legs could take me. Finally, I just stopped going there. But I still had to attend school. Now I arrived at school each day with a knot in my stomach fearing that you might stop by our classroom. Or I might even catch a moment's glimpse of you which was enough to shoot my body and mind into survival mode. It was an exhaustion that no child should have to bear.

My biggest loss and one I have not ever been able to fully regain

is my loss of faith. I no longer believed that the church was a place where good happened, where solace could be found and where there was a God who watched over me. To me that all became a lie after knowing you. I envy my friends who can take comfort in a God who protects them from evil. I envy my friends who consider their church communities to be a second family. But I know deep down to this day that is all a lie. And you, Richard Lauinger, planted that seed.

There are many more like me that you will never hear from. But I wanted to say on my behalf and theirs that your self-serving actions destroyed parts of who we were and parts of who we could have become. I can only hope that you understand the gravity of your actions and feel some measure of sorrow.