

My Spirit was murdered: now what?

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How can a person live with a murdered spirit? When the body is murdered we can grieve a while, have a ceremony that brings closure, and after the burial, life moves on and healing begins. For the murdered spirit we have no ceremony of closure, there is no burial. Healing would appear impossible. The person seems alive; but they are dead inside. Filled with shame, rage, fear, feeling hopeless, they know loneliness so profound, that they are certain no one else has ever experienced anything like it.

Boys and men who were sexually betrayed and violated know what happens when a spirit is murdered. We have been stunned at the news that a very small number of priests had become sexual predators. They sought out and then abused boys and teens. Many of us went numb at first, in utter disbelief. When feelings were expressed, they were too often aimed solely at the abusers and

those who sheltered them. We are “uncomfortable” when *men* break the silence and speak out about their ordeal *no matter who the abuser was*.

Over fifty years ago, I was raped and tortured and made to do, and to allow things to be done to me that are an agony to talk about even today. For over three years, a young man who was the friend of my scoutmaster sodomized me repeatedly. I have gone through so many stages of fear and loathing, of depression and rage, of gnawing emptiness.

Although I am a Capuchin Franciscan and a Priest, I have lived a life of despair.

Many people find it difficult to see that an abused *boy* was in fact harmed *just as much as a girl would have been*. That the boy was just as innocent and free of blame for what was done to him as if he had been a girl. Unfortunately, too many people do not realize that boys

starved for adult attention, and my perpetrator knew all about the alcoholism that was rampant in my home. He used that knowledge to make me feel that he alone would be my best hope for some kind of normal life.

Secondly, I needed to be with my friends. I needed to have the opportunity to be mentored into manhood. Most of what happened at scouts was very good. The guys that were most important to me were in the troop, and my unsuspecting scoutmaster, was a father figure to me. I learned how to make the transition from boy to young man in the scouts. I can't imagine not having been a boy scout. I always hoped that he would not be there this time, or that he would choose someone else. It bothers me to think that I would wish such horror on someone else. But at the time, it was what I felt and actually hoped for.

Why did you go back? Why didn't you tell?

I feel certain that every man who was molested more than once and especially by the same predator is asked these two questions. Recently, on the Web Site of MaleSurvivor, a thread was started on the subject of *why didn't you tell*. There are too many reasons to mention them all. Some are:
* I knew I would not be believed.

* I was afraid for my life.

* My mother and father assaulted me, who was I to tell.

* I did tell and was sent home to receive a severe beating.

* I was told not to tell or else.

* I was told I would be accused of starting it.

* I was told it was me or my little brother.

* I was told it was me or my sister.

* I did not know who to tell.

* He told me this is the special way guys show they love each other.

* I didn't know it was wrong at first.

* I was afraid I would be punished.

* I liked it at first, the oral part, then, when I didn't like it, I was afraid I would be blamed.

* I did not tell because I was certain that no one in the whole world had had *that* done to them — just dogs do that. It was funny watching the dogs. It was not funny when it was done to me.

* It was the adults who made the rules. What would telling have to do with it?

* I did tell and then was told I was a very bad boy for saying such an awful thing about such a good man.

* I was afraid of rejection by my friends.

* I was afraid of being teased.

* I told and nothing happened ex-

cept older boys started to do the same "kind of games."

Why Did We Go Back? Some answers are:

* I had no choice - I lived with them, my family.

* My parents went out and had the babysitter stay with me. I told them I did not like him/her but they said I was being a bad boy.

* My friends were there and I would have been alone.

* I wasn't permitted to skip school.

* I had to go to Sunday School.

* The coach would have kicked me off all sports forever.

* My parents told me I *had* to help the person next door.

* I wanted to make Eagle Scout.
* It was a matter of "do it" or get beaten up bad.

It's all about POWER

To understand how any of this can happen, we need to understand that it is all about an adult who has great power *and knows how to use it*, and a powerless child who has unquestioned trust of the adult. I was 15 or 16 years old when the assaults ended. I was a rather big kid. Had I told anyone of the assaults they surely would have asked: "*why did you let him do that to you?*" The answer is simple. He had power and I did not. Sometimes the power can

be as simple as asking ourselves, "Who would they believe, me or him?" It was clear no one would believe me - "he" would never do that! It is as though I could hear them say "*What is wrong with you to say such a sick thing?*" Of course, in fact, I would not have lived to tell anyone.

It is NOT a "guy thing"

Sometimes I have heard it said, especially when the talk is about violations of a teen, that the teen wanted it and enjoyed it. Some say it is just a "guy" thing, or "they were just horsing around." Think about that - can anyone honestly believe that men and boys are regularly sodomizing each other, or giving oral sex to each other? Does anyone truly think they are getting naked and masturbating each other? Does anyone think that their husband, father, brother, son, nephew is actually doing these things? Of course not!

Teenage boys "getting lucky with an older woman"

When it comes to teenage boys as victims of an adult woman, the words get particularly offensive. Recently, a prestigious Chicago newspaper reported on three teen

boys 16 and 17 years old and a 42 year old woman who had been having sex with the boys. *The article insisted that this is not sex abuse.* Change the genders and no one would argue that it is not abuse. Boys who are molested did not seek it, want it or ask for it any more than girls and women ask to be raped.

Adolescent boys, who have sex with a woman who is five, ten or more years older than they, do not always see themselves as abused. However, *they have been betrayed and exploited* and it causes a great deal of harm down the line. Such boys later in life speak of feeling like they are raping their beloved wife when they have sex. A number of married survivors report that they simply can't be comfortable with any physical intimacy with their wives, even though they love them so much. Many are not able to have a relationship with a girl until much later in life. Most all will not know how to trust others. They will have a poor self-image of themselves as men and a long list of problems, all traced back to their being sexualized by an older woman. The older woman uses the boy for her sexual gratification and then tells the boy how good he is or even how lucky his girlfriends will be. There has been a growing number of female teachers having sex with adolescent boys in the past few years it seems. However, sexual betrayal by family members and close friends of the family still remains

number one among those who molested boys.

Prevalence of sexual betrayal and violation of boys

Statistics today report that *one in six boys* in America is molested by the age of 16. If we count the times when the boy was not physically touched, such as if he was made to take his clothes off, perform a sex act on himself, allow himself to be videotaped or photographed in the nude but not touched by the perpetrator, the percentage then rises to *one in four boys before the age of 16 years* (Richard Gartner, PhD, in *Betrayed as Boys*).

What happens to these boys? If they keep the secret and do not get help what is life like for them as they grow into adulthood? It is an ugly picture. *One in five of these boys will become an abuser himself.*

The boy molested by another male will worry that he has been made a homosexual. If the boy was tending toward a homosexual orientation he will feel that he was violated because the perpetrator could tell he was homosexual and that is why he was assaulted. A seemingly natural conclusion would be that he will be assaulted often, simply because of his orientation. The truth is that a boy does not become gay for having been molested by a man, any more than

being sexualized by a woman will make a gay boy to be heterosexual. Survivors have an array of sexual problems, ranging from confusing sex and love, to sexual addictions, use of pornography, and the inability to relate comfortably to their girlfriends and wives. Relationship problems plague them throughout their lives. They often loathe their own bodies and see sex as dirty and/or violent, something to be avoided.

Wounded spirits

There is a wound to the spirit of the victim that seems beyond the touch of any form of healing. I would tell my spiritual directors and therapists that I felt ruined, damaged to the core of my being. They tried heroically to get me to be kinder to myself, to not judge myself so harshly. For the most part I just could not accept their healing words.

We feel ashamed, weak, and worthless. Even when it is pointed out that we were just kids when we were attacked, still, we feel that as males we should not have allowed it, that in some strange way we are at least partially to blame. We will rush to tell a young teen who comes to tell us of his abuse that he is not guilty at all. But our own souls seem impervious to that truth.

A conversation with a survivor brought home to me how bizarre this

thinking is. This man was assaulted by an older boy scout on his campouts. As he was cleaning the attic of his mother's home prior to selling it, he found a box of things from his childhood. It contained his boy scout shirt, among other things. As he held the shirt up to look at it, he was overwhelmed with sadness as he realized how small that shirt was, how small he was when he was assaulted sexually.

For long, emotionally draining years, we feel that we better keep silent. If we tell we either will not be believed, or we fear we will be shunned by our loved ones. Perhaps we will be considered a pervert who is not safe to be around even though eighty percent of us never become abusers. We just fear that we will be treated as some kind of a freak, because that is often how we feel about ourselves. Some survivors have told of having their own sisters and brothers be overly protective when he, the survivor, is around his nieces and nephews. Is it any wonder that many men just decide to keep it all secret?

Because we were sexualized in a traumatic betrayal, we have more problems than the ordinary person in understanding sexuality as a gift of God, as something beautiful, as something that binds people together in healthy ways. We fall in love - but in that very act we feel we are in danger; that in some vague way that we cannot understand, the person

we love represents a danger to us. We may marry and even have children. But in so many marriages, the survivor lives in a state of denial, or terror, and wants so badly to tell his spouse of his abuse but fears losing her if he does. For some survivors, telling a spouse *has* brought on problems leading to the break-up of their marriage.

The feeling that we are not normal, that we are inferior men, that we are an aberration, haunts us. Even after years of treatment it will still own at least a small part of our heart. For too many men the pressure of self-hatred and self-blame leads them to depression, anxiety, mental illness and suicide.

Fortunately, today, more of us are getting the strength to speak out, to break the silence. A number of men have banded together in an organization called MaleSurvivor. Here sexually violated men can find understanding, support and encouragement to continue the journey to healing, in hope. A surprising number of men do use the chat room and discussion boards at MaleSurvivor where they can break the silence and maintain a safe anonymity.

It was shocking to me, *at first*, to hear of the number of boys who are violated by a female, whether she be a family member, a baby sitter, a teacher, or a friend of the family. The consequences to the boy betrayed by a female are different in some respects from the male on male viola-

tion. But the difference does not mean less or easier, it simply means different in some aspects. Boys abused by women do not fear that they are gay.

Predator priests have become the object of much attention. But priests are by no means the largest number of male perpetrators. However, since it was the priests of our church who brought this problem to national attention, it is my hope that the members of the Catholic Church can be in the forefront of compassion and understanding of all victims. Trusting the survivor, professing your belief in him or her as a good person, and a safe person would be good first steps.

Survivors, or the family and friends of survivors, can go directly to the web site of MaleSurvivor to find help, a therapist, or simply acceptance and understanding.

Men will not come forward. Teens will not come forward, until society shows it has compassion for them and is willing to try to understand their pain and embarrassment. We, who have survived, are not less men, we are stronger men. A weaker man would not have survived.

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