

Dear Pope Francis

When I was 10 years old, in grade 5 at a Catholic Elementary School in London Ontario; I confided in a priest during confession that my teacher had been sexually abusing me for months. Shaking and weeping I begged God (aka Father) to forgive me for being involved in this mortal sin with my teacher because I was told by my parents that if you died with a mortal sin on your soul you would not go to heaven.

Upon hearing about what was happening to me; I was invited to the priest's side of the confessional to " pray "... Instead I was shamed, persecuted and violated. I was told I had a " dirty mind " and that if I didn't stop having these " fantasies " I would grow up to be a " slut ". When I begged that He believe me, he insisted I sit on his lap and SHOW him what was happening sexually with my teacher. He pulled my bottom up to his groin and proceeded to grind his erect penis into my rectum. He then told me to kneel in front of his chair and begin reciting my rosary with my eyes closed as a punishment for " making up stories cause no one would ever believe a kid over an adult."

When I opened my eyes, his zipper was open and it was hanging out. He told me to " touch and put my mouth on it," so he could " see " just how badly I had sinned. Then he handed me a white handkerchief with gold threaded trim to wipe my tears.

I wish I could say I ran or punched and kicked but I was frozen. I wish I had known this was abuse. I wish I could say I told someone but I didn't. You see, when you are raised in a devoutly Catholic home; you do what you are told, whether it's your parents, teachers or priests.

At my young and innocent age I believed the priest was God incarnate! So even when god demanded a blowjob from my 10 year old little girl self, I did it because I didn't want to end up in hell for being disobedient. My so called "penance" that day, changed my life forever. I continued attending mass faithfully, praying for an absolution that never came. I have only fragmented memories of the next 3 years of elementary school. And by high school I was battling anorexia, self-harm, depression, nightmares, panic attacks, suicidal ideation, dissociation and severe PTSD, even hospitalization.

Like far too many child victims; more abusive relationships and further sexual assaults were in my future; both as a youth and an adult. Then, AGAIN, 8 years later, I sought counsel of the Parish Priest, at the prompting of my Mother. I had been raped a block from my home and subsequently become pregnant. I desperately

needed guidance and spiritual direction. I had hoped to be helped with a referral to a maternity home etc. Instead I was told my family should not have to bear my shame. Nor have to answer for my poor choices.

Instead, Father arranged an abortion through a Irish Catholic Doctor in our parish who could get me into a special doctor who would " make this go away and not hurt anyone ." Anyone but me that is.

In many ways that abortion has haunted me more than the child sexual abuse, because it went against every one of my religious and my core beliefs. I have raised 8 kids in the Catholic Church (despite my personal tragedies) because I counted them as isolated incidences, that had only happened to me.

Later, after the Boston Clergy Abuse, Pope John Paul referred to these cases of bad apples per se not the Priesthood. I continued to give tithes and offerings, volunteered at youth events and even did Eucharist Ministry for the very same church that abused me! Shame is painful and complicated. Denial : a survival mechanism. And Catholic Guilt is much more surreal that what many of us realized.

I pray for everyone who has kept these kinds of secrets for decades. I know the depth of the heartache. I too, feel the loss of what life could have, would have and should have been. I understand the fear of judgement, speculation and betrayal. But I am also learning of late, that the lies I've told myself in order to survive are far more painful than the truth itself. And I believe that when the truth becomes air, I will breathe again. I will shout from the rooftops even if my voice breaks and my knees shake until every victim can stand unashamed and say " me too. "

Anonymous