

# The Brown Papers

*a monthly essay of reflection  
and analysis from the  
Women's Theological Center*

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*Dear readers:*

*The following essay recounts a journey of healing from sexual and ritual abuse. We know that not everyone is in a position to hear such stories. **For those in recovery from sexual or ritual abuse, we hope you will read this with the appropriate support from a friend or therapist.***

*Furthermore, we ask you to note that while this issue is dated March/April, 2002 — because that is where we are in our publishing schedule — its actual publication date is January, 2003.*

*The editors*

## **In the Name of the Father... And of the Son... And of the Holy Ghost... Amen!**

by Kathleen M. Dwyer

In Catholicism, this essay's title is called "the act of blessing yourself." It is done as the Catholic's head is bowed downward. The right hand comes upward to the middle of the forehead as the person says, "In the Name of the Father"... the hand then goes to the middle of the chest as the person speaks the words, "And of the Son," and finally, the hand is lifted from the chest and touches each shoulder (the left one first) as "And the Holy Ghost" is spoken, with both hands ending clasped together as "Amen" is said. This blessing is done at the start and at the end of prayers and at the beginning and ending of the Catholic Mass...it is done by many Catholics when they walk in front of a Catholic church...Catholic athletes do it before games...Catholic military people do it before entering battle...it is done by countless Catholics for countless reasons to bless, protect and produce a positive outcome. It has a shorter form known as making the "Sign of the Cross" which is done on the person's forehead. It is quicker and less conspicuous. You simply make the sign of the cross with your right thumb in the middle of your forehead. I was taught that the results are the same. This blessing is considered a sacred act and when you do it, you receive not only a feeling of belonging to something bigger but also of indulgences that can add up to reduce the time you must spend suffering in the fires of purgatory.

For some of us raised Catholic however, the sign of the cross has become one of many rituals that reflect the people responsible for generations and cen-

turies of ritual and sexual abuse and betrayal done to individuals and groups of individuals by some of the fathers and some of the sons and by some of the popes, cardinals, priests, nuns and laity of the Catholic Church. Collectively, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost represent the generational abuse by those with power to those groups of people defined as dispensable. In my individual case, the Father in the Sign of the Cross is my grandfather and the Son is my biological father – both of whom sexually abused me over many years. The Holy Ghost is the priest and two men from Knights of Columbus (K of C), which is the highest held and richest male laity organization within the Catholic Church, who along with my biological father ritually and sexually abused me as a child. They cloaked their abuse in sacredness and used God’s name to justify and sanctify the sacrifice of me and my kitten and framed it in what was supposed to be a sacred space. And, as the blood poured out, over, on and through me, I remembered two of the ten commandments and I said to God “Yes, yes I will. I will ‘Love the Lord Thy God with my whole heart and with my whole soul and with my whole mind’ and yes, yes I will, I will ‘Honor thy Father (both priestly and biologically) and Mother’ but please dear God” I prayed...“please...please make me not be.” As if in answer to my prayer, after surviving each trauma, a part of us would be placed in a death like sleep with memories forgotten but not their effects. As an adult, only photographs from my childhood, the shared memories of family members and a few personal memories confirmed that I did exist...that I did have a history on this earth prior to adulthood. And it was in my 54<sup>th</sup> year, after three years of a second long term round of therapy that continues today, more of my repressed past resurrected into my consciousness. More of the blank spaces of time that did not cover the familiar incest I had remembered in the early eighties started to come to memory. In spite of the fact that the church was woven throughout all the memories of the incest I experienced, it was only three or four years ago that *we*\* were able to begin to name the ritual, sexual and spiritual abuse that was done to us by the church and some of its very powerful representatives.

I am a 57 year old white, working class lesbian mother of two adult children and a trauma survivor of incest and priest ritual and sexual abuse. My mother gave birth to me in 1945. Later in life I learned that while I was developing within her womb, the doctor told her that most likely only one of us would live. Still later I learned that neither of us had lived but rather both of us had survived. She went on to survive until the age of 54 at which time, in spite of serious heart problems, the doctors approached me with their more immediate concern which was that they felt that my mother was very depressed and wanted to die. They asked if I knew any reason she might be struggling so with living. At that time I did know. I felt it was about the domestic violence she experienced from my father. But I said nothing because I also thought I was wrong because, after all I thought, isn’t that just how life is?

Today, after years of surviving, there are parts of me who do live...they

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\*As is reflected in my desire to recognize and honor all of those known and unknown spirits, animals and people who have helped me to survive and to learn to live, when I write, I often use the pronoun *we* rather than *I* as a way to recognize and honor all the parts of who I am. When I write about *the we that means all of who I am*, for the purpose of this writing, it will be in italics.

live competently, honestly and lovingly. However, there are still parts that are simply surviving...simply trying to get through the next day...the next hour ... the next moment. Today I know that at a very early age, as a result of father (both biological and priestly) ritual, sexual, emotional and spiritual abuse, I developed multiplicity or, what is now referred to as Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). The goal for all of who I am is to become as whole as *we* possibly can before it is our time to pass over.

It is important for readers to realize that while this may in some ways be the story of many, it is also the story of just one. What has been helpful and healing for me may not necessarily be so for another. This is not a sacred gospel for everyone but rather a sacred journey for me that includes sharing it with many. It is my truth...my pain...my search and desire for healing and wholeness. If it can help another gain understanding of personal and systemic oppression that is wonderful...if it can help another in their journey of healing and wholeness then let us all say "Blessed Be." Writing this *Brown Paper* is also a part of that process. It will address the legacy of the ritual, sexual, emotional and so destructively, the spiritual abuse done to me by a priest, two members of the Knights of Columbus and my father. It will also address my ongoing work towards healing and wholeness as well as the interconnectedness of the personal with the collective. While it will not overtly address the other incest, physical, emotional and spiritual trauma that happened to me throughout my childhood in my family, my extended family and my community, all of that is also part of who I am and has contributed to the legacy and will therefore, undoubtedly, be in the writing that follows.

While a Study-Action participant at the WTC, I came to understand that the family I grew up in was a white, very religious, poor working class Irish Catholic family. As time passed, it became clear to me that our identity as Catholics was far more important and far more strong than any thing else, including being Irish. For us, family was church and church was family. I was the youngest of four children and the only one who never attended Catholic schools. This was because in late 1949 or early 1950, when I was four years old, my father moved our family from what is referred to in Massachusetts as the "North Shore" to the "South Shore" and at that time, in the town of Braintree, there were no Catholic Grammar Schools. While this move was only a move of about 25 or 30 miles and today, a 30 minute drive, at the time it was considered a move of great distance as there was no expressway that connected communities nor did we have a car to drive on the roads that would take us there. Trains and trolleys were available but were also a long journey of at least two hours each way. It was also a move away from all extended family to a place where none of us knew anyone and to a house that was considered to be on the "wrong side" of the tracks and in the "poorest section" of town. All of these things made the move especially difficult for my mother and most likely increased her depression. However, it was a move to a community that had two Catholic churches (it now has three) and the place we lived was a short walk to one of them, St. Francis of Assisi Church. This is the church my family referred to as "our parish," where communions and confirmations were made... where confessions were said and penances done. This is the church where girls scouts happened, and one of my brothers was an altar boy and where both my

sister and I, at different times, sang in the choir. This was the church all the children were married in, some grandchildren were baptized in and the mother and father of our family were buried from. And this was the church where the ritual, sexual, emotional and spiritual abuse happened to me shortly after moving to Braintree and where at least three of my parts were born so that all of us could survive.

### **Returning to Therapy**

Therapy for me has required a spiritual dimension and a therapist who understands that need. The first round of therapy, which lasted from about 1982 to 1987 was with Elizabeth Bernier, a Christian therapist. She was a wonderful woman who was able to hold and celebrate her own beliefs without having to force them on others or indeed, exclude the beliefs of others. Her understanding of the connection between spirituality and trauma helped me break the silences about the sexual abuse done to me that I had been forbidden to break by my father, grandfather and others in the community, and to begin a healing journey that still continues. Even though we both knew that there were still huge gaps of years in my memory and undoubtedly more abuse, at her urging, we both agreed to end therapy as a way to give me an opportunity to, as I have often put it, “fly a little bit.” And fly I did. I received a BA in Human Services, incorporating the Study/Action Program at the Women’s Theological Center into my degree. I became an anti-racist and anti-ism activist, director of Women’s Substance Abuse Treatment programs (a field I still am in), single parented my two children (both of whom were born with serious medical problems), came out as a proud lesbian, created and conducted workshops on the connections between addiction, domestic violence, incest, spiritual abuse and the “isms” of this culture, and had three of my early poems published. I also continued my on-going search for spirituality, completed an unpublished manuscript and, this past June, celebrated 18 years of sobriety. Clearly, the mother, director and writer part of who I am ran the show for several years.

Eventually however, those competent and successful parts of who I am began to tire and the other parts began to recognize that they continued to be silenced. Silenced no longer by the perpetrators but by the very one they had been created to help. I had always kidded that my mind was a dangerous place to visit, but it was only a joke for those who I said it to because the fact was, through all those “flying years” *we* were being battered by flashbacks, body memories, smells and feelings that *we* hated, dreaded and could make little sense of but contributed to the on-going fragmentation we felt. Gradually, their frequency increased as did the preoccupation with death and finally, after a failed relationship due to my increased inability to be present and a change in jobs which afforded me more income, I began therapy again.

Finding a therapist was difficult. I knew it could not be with my former therapist and yet I did not know where to find one that would be able to deal not only with the director/therapist part of who I am but also with the spiritual part *we* so needed. Fortunately for *us*, after meeting *our* therapist on several occasions and participating in two workshops she conducted I thought that if there was anyone who could deal with me she would be the one. Her name is Ann Drake Psy.D. and in addition to being a Psychologist, she is also a Sha-

man and brings to her work prayer, compassion and love. We work well together and, unlike so many trauma survivors who have had to struggle to find a skilled and trustful therapist who could, with appropriate boundaries and limit setting abilities, love, challenge and support them in their healing process, I have once again been so fortunate as to have found a woman willing to walk and bear witness on and to our journey.

In late 1995 I began a second round of therapy with Ann that continues on even as I write this paper. In addition to all the other reasons I have given for starting therapy again the strongest and most urgent reason was that I knew I would be dying soon if I did not make some attempt to stop the downward spiral that was occurring within my being and the mother part of who I am did not want to leave a legacy of suicide for her children if it could be avoided.

The first three plus years of my work with Ann was spent gaining additional clarity and healing on the familial and community trauma that happened to me and how I had survived. As my method of survival (i.e., multiplicity) became more and more evident and *we* reached an acceptable level of safety, more and more parts of who I am began to reveal themselves to Ann and to friends *we* felt safe enough to tell. Accepting the fact that in order for me to survive the trauma I experienced I had to split off and become a “*we*” was very difficult, and at times, seemed to make *us* feel, however differently, just as horrible as the abuse *we* had survived. Yet, in time and with much dialogue and support *we* have come to celebrate and be thankful for all of who *we* are and understand that there is no way *we* could have functioned in this world the way *we* have functioned had the multiplicity not happened. Once a strong enough foundation developed with Ann and with the parts of who I am, some of the missing time in our life began to be found and named. In 1997 *we* drew a picture of our system and in that picture was a big, wooden, padlocked box with a Spirit Guide sitting on top of it and with another part of us holding it shut with our foot. *We* told Ann at the time that the box could never be opened because inside there was just too much for us to deal with. But by 1999 the lock on the box came off and the lid gradually began to open. The memories locked away in that box and held by other parts of us are horrific and when combined with the whole of *us* reflect what *we* have come to understand as the force of survival that unreasonably, and not uncommonly, pushes on without conscious desire. The rest of this paper will briefly recount *our* journey to date of climbing out of the box, seeing and speaking our truth and ultimately the on-going process of trying to heal, trying to break free from the clutches of the past and trying to become as whole as we can before it is time to pass over.

Writing and drawing has always been an important part of *our* survival. Throughout *our* first round of therapy *we* wrote constantly but did not share the writings as *our* therapist felt it was most important for *us* to give sound to *our* long ago silence voiced. To my surprise, much of what *we* wrote at that time contained information that was related to the work I have done and am doing with Ann. Because of this, *we* now write letters to Ann during the week and read them at the beginning of each session. This helps to prevent the holding and concealing of memories by *our* different parts and to enhance the potential for healing for all of who *we* are. My work with Ann has also included a lot of drawing, especially when there are no words that I can find to describe the hor-

ror I feel. In February of 1997, I drew a detailed drawing of the stairs leading to the cellar of the house I grew up in and to the small crawl space “room” where I was, at times, made to stay. March of that same year, as I said earlier, I drew a picture of all the parts in our system I was aware of and, in April I drew various scenes of abuse from my childhood. In the early summer of 2000, after about a year of dealing with what seemed like endless and at times immobilizing body, taste and smell memories and flashbacks of robed men, my father, my kitten, knives, blood and me, I locked myself in my space for a weekend and drew an eight foot mural of the scenes of the ritual and sexual abuse that was done to me and was living constantly in my brain. When finished, I felt terrified but was able to call and receive support from Ann. Later, I rolled the mural up, and my friend Mary Lambert came and put it in my car and I brought it with me to my next session. It is hard to find the words to describe the terror all of who I am experienced, but with support *we* got through it and in so doing *we* took a very big step towards more healing and wholeness. It was as if everything *we* had done before now had brought us to this point and now, at least some of who *we* are were ready, to enter and try to heal from the hell *we* had known when *we* were abused and betrayed in God’s name.

*We* worked very hard with Ann. There were many days that were, as the saying goes “touch and go;” where depression was a constant companion and where suicide seemed a far better alternative than this process *we* had entered and now, were unable to leave. Once the denial is broken, it is hard, if not impossible, at least for *us*, to go back to that realm. In spite of Ann’s constant encouragement for us to speak to others and indeed, in spite of my own experience of the healing power of speaking our truth to others, *we* were able to tell only one or two of our trusted friends and our downward spiral to isolation increased. Early on in *our* awareness, *we* spent much of our time being afraid that “they” (the church, the priest, the K of C and my father) would get *us*, even though it was most likely that those involved had died. Of course, some of our parts were still children and didn’t know so much time had passed... others thought that the abusers had spiritual powers ordained by God that would enable them to reach out from the grave and get *us* for our betrayal in speaking our experience...and all but a few of *us* felt so strongly that *we* had deserved everything that had happened...that *we* were evil and that they were, in God’s name, just removing the evil from within *us* that it was, and at times still is, hard to think of speaking our truth, let alone thinking *we* didn’t deserve what had happened. The one thing *we* all seemed able to agree on was the sacrifice of our kitten. *We* knew she didn’t deserve what had happened to her and perhaps that is part of what kept *us* going along with Ann’s consistent patience and challenge of what *we* had been programmed to believe.

And then, on January 21, 2002 the *Boston Globe* broke the story of the sexual abuse scandal in the Archdiocese of Boston. Focusing initially on Paul Shanley, a charismatic and well known priest of the sixties, seventies and eighties, they gradually expanded their coverage to include other priests who had abused but had never been named publicly but, like Shanley, had also been moved by the church hierarchy from parish to parish. There was nowhere *we* could go that *we* didn’t hear something about some priest sexually abusing some child or vulnerable adult. There was nowhere *we* could go that *we* didn’t

hear about some Priest, Bishop and/or Cardinal not only covering up and protecting the abusers, but also moving them from parish to parish...from child to child...all to protect the "Holy Church." And there was nowhere *we* could go that *we* didn't hear about some other case that the church had financially settled, outside of the court but with the stipulation that the victim must remain forever silent. *We* would hear victims speak and identify so strongly with them that, often, if in *our* car, *we* would have to pull over to the side of road as the tears welled in *our* eyes and the pain *we* felt in our body would hamper our ability to drive safely. As hard and as triggering as the stories were, they also brought with them a gift of community and in February of 2002, as a result of all the media coverage and *our* own concern that most of the victims *we* heard were male and that the church was building a case to scapegoat the Gay population for the scandal, *we* decided to inform the church of *our* experience. With the support of Ann and two dear friends, Loretta Butehorn and Mary Lambert, *we* called and made an appointment to speak with a representative of the Archdiocese of Boston.

### **The First Meeting**

On March 8, 2002 at 10AM *we* were given an appointment at the Chancery of the Archdiocese of Boston to meet with Sister Rita McCarthy to report our abuse. My friend Loretta Butehorn came with me and I had scheduled an appointment with my therapist Ann for 3:30 that afternoon. I was doing everything in my power to make this process as safe and unabusive as possible but I was clear that I needed to break my silence. Because when talking about the abuse I often slip into stuttering, silence or another part of who I am will come out and end conversations, I had written a statement to present to the person *we* were meeting with. I also brought the mural with me and, for the first time, prior to the meeting showed it to Loretta. At that point, she was the only other person besides Ann who had seen it. I will be forever grateful for the support I had that day as it turned out to be far more painful and scary than I had imagined.

When Sr. McCarthy came out to greet us, she presented as an older and somewhat fragile woman. She initially did not seem to remember our conversations and claimed she had no record of us having an appointment, in spite of my calling the day before and leaving a voice mail that we would be there. After the initial awkwardness, she said that we could come in and meet with her anyway as she had some free time. The building was large and felt very cold, not in temperature as much in energy. Sr. McCarthy brought us into a room off a long hallway that was quite bare with only a table and a couple of chairs. She left the door to the hallway open but fortunately, as I began to speak, my friend Loretta asked if it was okay to close the door. Speaking of such intimate and devastating things to an open and traveled hallway would have been truly devastating. As I began to speak, it took only moments before I began to stutter and fearing that my part named Dylan, who often comes out when things get too emotional, would come out and decide *we* should not be there, *we* went right to our written statement which included much of our history as previously written in this paper but with more details about the type of Catholic family *we* were and the type of Catholic church our family belonged to. *Our* statement to

her told her how our identity was more Catholic than anything else and that the type of Catholic we were “included those who believed anyone who wasn’t Catholic went to hell...that we were bad and could only hope that God would help us to be good...that God knew everything and saw our every move and that He would punish us for all the wrong and bad things we committed. That if we were lucky and didn’t have mortal sin on our soul when we died, we would make it to purgatory...” The statement also said that we were taught that “If you died and had a mortal sin on your soul, but had not gone to confession, you would go straight to hell, forever and ever to burn in the fire down there. We were, however, told that we could cut down on our time spent in the constant fire of punishment in purgatory if we read and/or did things the church called indulgences. For example, we were told that if each time you walked by a Catholic church you blessed yourself you were able to take off about 350 years worth of time spent in purgatory. I remember at one point being terrified because if one sign of the cross reduced your sentence by 350 years, how long then did you get sentenced there?”

The statement went on to say that the type of Catholic we were raised included the theory on Limbo, nightly rosary, May processions, Holy Name Society, Knights of Columbus and our father being one of the men who passed the “poor box” at Mass each week. It also included as detailed as was possible for me at the time a description of the ritual and sexual abuse that was done to me and how part of that abuse included the sacrifice of my kitten, with her blood being put on, in and through me and with the ritual ending in my being raped. The statement also said that it happened more than once and that we felt in addition to the priest and my father, two members of the K of C were also involved.

Her first response was not to the abuse but rather to the “type of Catholic” we were and she said something to the effect of how horrible and where did we ever learn such things. Fortunately, my friend Loretta, who was also raised Catholic said to her that she had learned similar things. She then did respond to the abuse saying that it was awful and unimaginable that we had to go through such a horrible thing. Before we left, we opened up the mural for her to see. She seemed struck by the scenes displayed in front of her. As we rolled it up she asked us what she had initially asked us which was what did we want from the church. We responded with the same answer that we had at the beginning of our meeting which was to tell about the abuse that had happened to me, to give the responsibility for that abuse back to the church and to possibly corroborate the stories of others. She then asked for a copy of a poem we had written entitled “In Case You Were Wondering” which also addresses what we were seeking. It is as follows:

#### **In Case You Were Wondering**

It is not revenge I am looking for  
It isn’t even justice that I seek  
One serves no purpose  
The other is not possible  
Change is what I hunger for

Change in me  
Change in you  
Change in our systems  
And then, the possibility of accountability and healing may really exist

Loretta and I left the Chancery and went to lunch at a place called “The Garden of Eden.” I then went to my appointment with Ann. Over the next few days we kept hoping to hear from Sr. McCarthy but days soon turned into weeks and suddenly, it was the end of April, and I still had heard nothing from her. On May 3, 2002 I wrote her a letter to express what it had been like since we had met, to offer her suggestions that may be helpful for other survivors she was to meet with, to let her know additional parts of the abuse and to ask her response to several questions including what happens with the information we gave her and if she had looked at the records of the church where the abuse took place. I also enclosed a photograph I had taken of the mural and asked her to let me now what she would do with it “even if it was just to put it in a file for now.”

On Friday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, *three* months after our meeting and one month after my first letter, I finally received a response from Sr. McCarthy in the form of a voice mail which said that an investigation was happening but that there was no documentation of a priest, between 1950 and 1960 by the name of Father Lovey at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Braintree. Father Lovey was the name I gave her of the priest who had conducted the ritual but what I had actually told her was that his name was “something like” Lovey. When I first heard that recorded message I was devastated. No priest by that name...no priest with a name that sounded like that... it was like my whole reality was gone...and I must truly be out of my mind. Yet, those feelings soon passed. I knew that priest had been there because while I may have repressed the abuse, I did not repress other things he did. I could see his face and feel his angry energy. I called my older brother and sister and asked if they remembered a priest by that name and not only did they remember him but they described him exactly as I had described him to my therapist, Loretta and Sr. McCarthy. However, they said to me “His name was not Lovey, Kathy, his name was Luddy.” I was happy for the confirmation but felt betrayed again by the church and Sr. McCarthy in particular. After all, it is not a very big leap for someone to imagine that a child might have difficulty pronouncing his name correctly, or in fact, given what he had done to me, could have been told by him to call him by another name. In this case, the irony of the name *we* remembered calling him still produces sadness and disgust within.

### **Increased Activism**

On Monday, June 10<sup>th</sup>, I left Sister McCarthy a voice mail telling her the appropriate name of the priest and asking her to call as she said she would and on June 30<sup>th</sup> I sent her yet another letter. I have never heard from her again. Nonetheless, having received confirmation of our memory, *we* felt stronger and were able to continue our journey of healing and becoming more whole by speaking and being active in the survivor movement. One of the first things we did was to attend a SNAP (Survivors Network for those Abused by Priests)

meeting and, unbelievably met an old neighbor, Arthur Austin, from our childhood. A victim of Father Shanley, he too has spent years struggling to heal from the devastation of both familial and priest abuse. Art not only remembered me, but he also remembered Fr. Luddy and what an angry man he was. He remembered things about my family that I did not and I learned as we talked that he too was raised the same “type” of Catholic as I had been raised. He talked about how his father and my father were “tight” and both members of the K of C as well as the Holy Name Society. I remember as we sat there and talked, it all seemed so unbelievable. Here it was, forty something years later, and the two of us, having lived on the same street, having attended the same church and having both been abused by priests from the same parish sat talking and sharing our horror with each other. We both recognized that it was not a coincidence that would have us meet after all those years. Suddenly, I just looked at him and asked him to hold me, and he did.

In the last few months my activism has increased. I am speaking out wherever possible and most likely, at times when some would prefer I would not. On Sunday mornings, I often go to the Cathedral of the Holy Cross where Cardinal Law frequently says Mass. Along with other survivors and survivor supporters, we picket in front of the Cathedral before and after the 11AM Mass holding posters of the children we once were. We also carry signs that call for Cardinal Law to resign and for the church to end its secrecy. I attended the conference that was held in Boston by the newly formed “Voice of the Faithful,” whose slogan is “Keep the Faith...Change the Church” and was positively overwhelmed by the response of about 600 people walking in solidarity to the Cathedral demanding church accountability and change after being challenged by my childhood friend Art, who was the final speaker at the conference. In his address he reminded them of the Apostle Peter’s inability to stay and pray with Christ and then asked if they could not stand and walk with us for one hour as we marched to the Cathedral. Many of the 4000 participants not only met the challenge that day, but continue to demonstrate at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross and at other churches in the tri-state area in support of survivors and change. I remember saying to Ann that being part of that march and receiving the acknowledgement, sorrow and gratitude to survivors for our breaking the silence from all of those people was an amazing experience but, I reasoned, it probably had to be that big for me to be able to receive it.

In late July I attended a meeting with a representative from the Archdiocese’s new Office of Healing and Financial Assistance to be a voice of a woman survivor. It was at that meeting that I learned that Sr. McCarthy was no longer at the Archdiocese but that the woman we were now meeting with, Barbara Thorp, would be the new person for survivors to contact. Because the director part of who I am was in attendance as a “survivor representative,” the impact of that information did not hit *us* until the next day, at which time *we* fell apart with fear and anxiety. *We* wondered what happened to our information...who has it...who has the picture of the rituals...who has *our* statement... who has *our* poem? The anxiety and fear became *almost* immobilizing but, somehow *we* were able to pick up the phone and call Ann. As a result of that, *we* were then able to call Barbara Thorp and tell her of *our* concern. She assured me that records were passed on to her and she would look for ours. A

day or so later she called to say she had found our records; however, when I asked her about contents of the records she said that they did not contain the picture of the ritual nor the two follow-up letters I had written. To this day, *we* do not know where those items are, but can imagine that they were most likely destroyed. As Barbara and I continued to talk, she asked if she could ask me a few questions about the abuse. I said yes and after perhaps the first response to one of her questions, *we* began stuttering and then, rather than Dylan, one of the child parts that lives within me came out along with all the fear that comes from telling something you were told you would die if you ever told. Eventually the adult came back but the anxiety persisted and it became apparent that *we* needed to meet with this new person, not as a representative of survivors but just as one survivor who wanted the church to know what had happened to her. Before we ended our conversation I remember Barbara asking *us* something like “this may be a stupid question but the church is paying for your therapy...right?” I said no and she quickly responded that they should and, if it were all right with me, she would mail me a form for my therapist to fill out. *We* answered “Yes,” but we were stunned and grateful, relieved and terrified, happy and sad. *We* experienced a great range of emotions and questions such as “what would it mean if *we* allowed the church to pay for our therapy?” or “what would *we* owe them if they do?” or “would this make it possible to get our credit card debt down and maybe have some chance of retirement before *we* reach the age of eighty?” ricocheted through our mind. Before ending our phone conversation, Barbara and I set a time to meet. Unfortunately, a week later she called saying she had to cancel our appointment and although while *we* were talking with her the fact that she had to cancel our appointment seemed to have no effect as soon as *we* hung up the phone, our anxiety began to build. After talking with Ann about this, *we* came to understand that at a very deep level Barbara represented the church to us and, once again, *we* felt dismissed and betrayed. When I told Barbara about this she was very understanding and we set another date to meet which would be on September 23, 2002 at 12 PM. Fortunately, *we* would not have to go back to the Chancery as the church (or more likely Barbara) had decided that the office that would be working with victims of priest abuse should not be on church grounds. *We* thought this was good. On September 18<sup>th</sup> I sent Barbara a letter, enclosing some of my writings and notifying her that my therapist, Ann Drake would also be coming to our meeting.

### **The Second Meeting**

The morning of the meeting I was not as nervous as I thought I would be. Ann and I met about a half hour prior to the appointment time and, one last time, went over what it was that all of who I am wanted to accomplish in this meeting. As per my request, Ann had brought the mural with her as I thought I might want to show it to Barbara. I had also brought a picture of the mural to be put with my other correspondence. The office is located in Newtonville in an office building that has various types of offices. It was much warmer than the Chancery and Barbara did not forget we were coming. As the meeting began I told her I thought it best for me to act as if this was the first time I was telling church officials and that I would read the statement I originally wrote

back in March. She agreed. It was a very hard meeting for us. *We* switched a few times (DID talk for different parts of who I am to come out) which is always a little embarrassing but, with Ann's support, *we* were also able to engage and speak our truth. Barbara was a good listener and most of who *we* are felt heard, believed and accepted. Both Ann and I believe that she truly felt bad for what we had experienced. At one point during the meeting I had asked Barbara if they had received any other reports from survivors of being both ritually and sexually abused. She solemnly answered yes, there are others, to date not by the same priest, but with similar ritual. As the meeting neared its end, once again with Ann's support, the mural was rolled open. Barbara took it in and responded in both a horrified yet compassionate way. *We* told her that at some point in our healing we hope to be able to destroy the mural through the creation of our own ritual or healing. Before we left, Barbara agreed to find information about Father Luddy that we wanted to know including his tenure at St. Francis of Assisi Church and the date of his death. She also said that the church would pay for my therapy retroactive to when we first came forward.

Ann and I talked briefly as she took me back to my car. *We* felt very sad, but other than that, *we* seem to have felt nothing. However, two days later in one of my "Letters to Ann" *we* wrote:

*We* have all worked hard to reach this place and have received and been affirmed in ways *we* could not have believed possible...yet, the depression remains and weighs *us* down and we once again feel like a loser.

*We* went on to say

...there is a (sense) of being on guard... not trusting what happened really happened...and now, a deepening realization that while Barbara is the representative of the church her power is only that which the church extends to her and it can be withdrawn at any time if they so choose. Please understand Ann that we are glad that somehow someone positive was hired for that position, but there is a reality to us that her position has more power for evil than for good and the more positive things she does the higher the risk for her being vacated. If the Church wants that position to support them it will have to turn it evil.

Barbara called about a week after we had met with information about Father Luddy. She told me that he had officially been assigned at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Braintree from 1952 to 1958, which was the year of his death. This information matched what I had remembered (i.e. I had told her that I thought he was there somewhere between 1950 and 1960.). Still, I needed more information than she gave me and I spent several afternoons in a local library scanning microfilm from the year of his death. I felt if I could find his obituary, there would be even more validation of my fragmented memory coming together. There was. Finally, after many blurry hours I spotted a small headline that said "Braintree Priest In 'Poor' Condition." It was Father Luddy and in the next day's paper was his picture, with the headline stating "Second Heart Attack Fatal To Rev. Fr. Luddy." I was sweating as I stared at his picture realizing he was the one I had remembered. "It was him!" I screamed inside

my head. It was his face that I saw when I was laid on the altar and the hood on his robe could no longer hide who he was. At first, I didn't know what to do. Even in his picture *we* could see and feel what *we* imagine was his rage and hate. I was so scared and didn't know if I could get up but, in time, the older woman I have become took charge and we were able to print everything out, including the next day's article that covered his funeral. As *we* read the titles and names of all the dignitaries, from both church and state, that had attended his funeral *we* found among them the name of one of the other men *we* believe participated in the abuse done to me. It listed that man as a 4<sup>th</sup> Degree member of Knights of Columbus, and then, in listing the titles and duties of Father Luddy, the article stated that he was the "Spiritual Director for the Braintree Catholic Youth Organization and the Ladies Sodality. He was also chaplain of the Braintree Knights of Columbus and in charge of the parish Christian doctrine class."

### **And Now**

It seems as if this past year has been filled with the crashing of fifty seven years of life rolled into one. While I know this not true, it is true that so much has happened this year to affirm my journey of 57 years. I have met other people, in addition to Art, from my childhood years...a woman who was my next door neighbor and who shared with me that she and her sister always hated the basement of "that" church and felt that something "really creepy" went on down there. She said that they did everything to avoid it and never wanted to go to Mass anywhere but the "upstairs part." Another woman, who remembered her father and mine putting up the flags throughout Braintree on all the holidays, especially the Fourth of July, also felt similar to the "downstairs" of the church. She too was raised the same "type" of Catholic as I and, while not abused by a clergy, she was, as a young girl, responsible for the care of the priest robes and vests and said how she hated to go into the basement of the church because, although she may not have used these words at the time, she had come to understand that what she felt in the basement seemed like negative or evil energy.

### **The Work, both the Personal and the Systemic continues**

I would love to be able to write here that *we* are done, healing has occurred and all is right with the world. Unfortunately, that only happens in Fairy Tales, and not even in all of them. The reality is that *we* still have days it is hard to go to work...that it is hard to hope...it is hard to survive...that it is hard to be. But, *we* are making progress. *We* finally went to the dentist after four years and, in spite of being incredibly triggered *we* are going back again. *We* are trying to get the courage to go for a yearly exam with our doctor who *we* haven't seen in five years. And sometimes, when a flashback seems to block our ability to see anything else, *we* are able to call someone and ask for support. Perhaps it is because *we* also somehow still realize and understand that in the larger picture, what happened to *us* is very small...that our time here, when compared with all of time is just a blink of an eye...and that with each breath *we* take, even if *we* are only breathing enough to sustain life rather than to live it, *we* must always come back to the whole...not just our whole, but the whole of all of that is life.

*We* commit to doing this work not because *we* care about the Catholic church and whether or not it survives but because *we* care about the earth and the sea and the people, animals and all the other forms of life that are trying to live here. *We* commit to doing this work not just so *we* can be as whole as possible when our time comes to “pass over” but so that others may become as whole as they are able to be. Most importantly, *we* commit to doing this work because just as *we* learned at WTC that racism is not just an issue for people of color, so too have *we* learned that this is not just an issue for survivors or for Catholics but is instead an issue about power and how that power for over 2000 years has been and continues to be abused, resulting in the rape, torture and death of countless people and life forms that should have been able to blossom into their own beauty. In a country that proclaims separation of Church and State, nothing could be further from the truth. Cardinal Law in Boston and other people in positions of power in the church, including the Pope, have claimed to be the Moral Authority of our country and indeed, of our world. They have placed themselves above the law, required only to answer to their God. Recently, I wrote a letter in response to Cardinal Law’s apology. In it I said:

That Cardinal Law expresses pain is understandable...that survivors should comfort him in that pain or, if forgiveness in this case means accepting that he will continue to lead the Archdiocese, is not. Regardless of his professed intent, the reality is that there are countless victims, survivors and other people who continue to struggle in their surviving or sadly, had died as a direct result of the abuse done to them by those they were taught were second only to God. I do not know of any other person who failed so many, so badly and truly understood the consequences of that failure, who would ever have the audacity to believe they should remain the leader, the father, the holy one.

I will never forget, nor will I ever stop thanking Donna Bivens for posing the question “Who will you stand with when the chips fall?” The day my friend Art addressed the Voice of the Faithful conference, he said a similar thing when he reminded the audience about the Apostle Peter who could not stay awake with Christ and, after recognizing that they who were not abused could walk away but we who survived the abuse could not, he challenged each member of the audience to stand and walk with us to the Cathedral. His challenge reminded me once again of the question Donna asked so many years ago to my Study/Action class and I tell each of you reading this article that the chips are falling here today...and I ask how many of you will come and stand with us, not only today, but in the days that are yet to come. I am no longer Catholic...I am no longer Christian...yet, I know the power the church had and, however differently, has in my life. If nothing else, please ask yourself and answer Donna’s question and know where you are standing...know who you are with and who you are not with...and know whether where you stand supports and maintains the status quo or serves to disrupt and keep it off balance until, perhaps someday in the future, the use of power, both individual and collective, can begin to be channeled for the well-being of all that is life. ♦

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