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Man: Priest Chose Prey

He Says Victims Like Himself were Children from Troubled Homes

By Andrew Tilghman
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Keveny Academy in Cohoes was like many Catholic schools in the 1970s — boys in blue blazers, a college-prep curriculum and nuns with little patience for disobedience.

David, now 47, remembers the principal, the Rev. James Kelly, calling him into his office — ostensibly for disciplinary reasons — and asking him to drop his pants.

"Once he had your pants down he would do the real inappropriate stuff," David said.

David came from a troubled home, but he said he also believes the sexual abuse that Kelly inflicted upon him behind closed doors at Keveny contributed to his 20 years of drinking, failed marriages and unsteady jobs.

He has two ex-wives. He has two sons, but he has contact with only one. He has lived in New York, Florida, Ohio and elsewhere. Currently, he lives with his mother, he said.

David said he never seriously considered telling anyone about his abuse at the time.

"I had an alcoholic for a father and he would've wanted to go over there and kill him. And my mother would have been freaking out, saying, 'He's a priest; he couldn't have done this,' " he said.

David said of Kelly: "I think he played with the kids who really didn't have a good family life at home."

Bishop Howard Hubbard removed Kelly in February from his most recent post as a prison chaplain in Carson City, Nev., after an Arizona man filed a federal lawsuit. The suit alleges that Kelly physically and sexually abused him in the late 1970s when he lived in Boys Town — the well-known home for wayward youths in Nebraska — and Kelly was a chaplain there.

In a telephone interview from his home in Carson City in February, Kelly denied sexually abusing any children, but he did recall asking teenage boys to drop their pants for "a few whacks on the bare behind."

David began drinking heavily and using drugs after graduating from Keveny, he said. He's been convicted twice of drunken driving and served three years in state prison for a 1984 conviction involving bad checks.

He lived for several months at St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center in Ogdensburg, where a doctor told him his sexual abuse had contributed to his problems.

He said he has been sober for nearly 10 years, and it was the spiritual component of an Alcoholics Anonymous program that forced him to come to terms with his sexual abuse.

"I got to look at it as though there are some really screwed up people out there and this isn't something God wanted to happen to me," he said.

In recent months, he has read about victims of sexual abuse receiving six-figure payments from the Diocese of Albany and he has only recently begun speaking to attorneys about his potential claim.

"I want one of those settlements. I want a big house overlooking the Adirondacks. Why not? I suffered enough for it," he said.

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