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Betrayed by a Family Friend

By Jimmy Breslin
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"We were out buying patio furniture, and when we got back to the house there was a police car in front," he was saying. "I figure, 'What are they doing here? One of the kids broke somebody's window. No, around here, they won't call if that happened. They know me and they know they'd get paid and the kids kept in the house.'"

This was yesterday afternoon across from his job on Seventh Avenue in Manhattan. He is a wounded Catholic. He commutes to Holbrook. He leaves at 6:30 in the morning and gets home at 7:30 at night. "How can you know anything?" he said.

"You didn't think of anything worse than a broken window?"

"I just stopped thinking. I saw a neighbor standing outside his house and looking. I didn't like that, I guess. My wife was different."

"What did she do?"

"She gets out of the car and runs into the house screaming."

"She knew."

"I guess women do. I went up to the neighbor and I said, 'Joe, what happened?' He said my kid fell. That's all he said. I went inside and he was on the floor. He died suddenly."

It was strange, but he doesn't go beyond that.

"We went to the hospital, and they had him on a stainless steel table. He was blue. I kissed him and left. You lose a son, 15 years, 3 months."

The wake was in Maloney's in Holbrook and the funeral Mass at Good Shepherd.

A priest, Father Brian McKeon, who was a very close friend of the young man's, you'd like this priest as soon as he walks into a room, the father says, had been out of town when he died, but he returned and said the requiem Mass and gave the eulogy.

"I don't remember any of it," the father was saying yesterday. "All I know is that he was there, our favorite priest, Father Brian McKeon. March 2, 1987, says Mass for my son." The priest immediately began to come around to comfort the younger brother.

"He still was with us so much. Barbecues, golf, any family gathering. I just thought, he never hung out with a family where there was just a daughter."

One day, a little over two years ago, there was a fight in the neighborhood between a couple of young men and it was over drinking and a priest's affections, and the word now went everywhere. He came home on the train at night and noticed his wife was uncomfortable and wouldn't say why. One night after that, she was on the phone with a family friend, Bob Fernandez, who was a retired New York detective.

"She held the phone and said that Bob wanted to tell me something. She said that there was something with Father Brian, and a few kids were involved, and so were ours. I took the phone. Bob said to me, 'I wanted to tell you myself before you hear this from anybody else.' He told me. The priest had molested my oldest son. He died. Then the first thing the priest did was molest the second kid. The brother dies and he moves in right away on a hurt kid. I threw the phone."

He and his wife went to the Long Island diocese headquarters at Rockville Centre. They had an appointment with Msgr. Fred Caldwell and Msgr. Alan Placa. Caldwell appears weak and yet somehow is in charge of personnel for the diocese. Placa is a round man with complaints of sexual abuse on Long Island that go back to the steam engine. He is a fixer, and this sort usually has charm to go with his piece of business. Beyond this, he was so universally disliked that it is wondrous how he lasted through a couple of bishops. His job was to lie to people like these two, with their dead son and abused second son, move the priest to safety in another parish and do it all without a lawsuit.

There was no bishop at that meeting, and the bishop today, William Murphy, aka Mansion Murphy, continues the tradition. The tradition of ignoring people. He certainly was not present in his diocese from the outset of this week when a Suffolk County grand jury issued a report that said the Long Island diocese ran a church with a twisted soul that handed disillusionment and even more pain to the trusting wounded.

Murphy was in Boston yesterday, appearing at a grand jury investigating the same outrages, sexual molesting of young people by priests who were moved about by Murphy when he was in Boston.

His career in his church consists of being a central figure in the largest scandal the American Catholic Church has had, with priests as pedophiles and bishops as pimps in New England and on Long Island, the ugliest, widest religious pillaging of young bodies to happen anywhere.

"What happened to McKeon?" I asked yesterday.

"They hid him. Then I'm with my wife and we were watching the St. Patrick's Day Parade two years ago. We were at 48th and Fifth on the east side of the street. We see the Nassau County Police Emerald Society, Brian McKeon, chaplain. We couldn't get through the barricades. We went down to Park Avenue and took a cab to 68th. You could cross the street there. I waited and then when McKeon came, I got in behind him and told him, 'Step out of line.' I had to say it twice. Then we walked off the line and into the park but there were so many cops there that I couldn't do anything. I will someday. If you ever see him, tell him I'm looking for him."

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