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Facing Her Torment

In a Rare One-on-One Discussion, Holbrook Woman Confronts Priest about Alleged Encounters

By Carol Eisenberg
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Janique McKenny had long imagined this moment. The day she would confront the Roman Catholic priest she accuses of taking her to an isolated stairwell every week for nearly a year. She was 13, and she said he would stand with his back against the wall and hold her for an hour -- so close that her face broke out from his Shetland sweaters.



Janique McKenny at age 12. She claims a Seaford priest molested her as a child and sat down in a rare one-on-one confrontation with her alleged attacker.

Photo by the Newsday

When she finally got the chance to talk with the Rev. William Logan last month, she said she decided to secretly tape-record their conversation.



Janique McKenny confronts the priest who allegedly molested her as a teen.
Photo by the Newsday / Tony Jerome

"For 25 years, I've been feeling guilty," the Holbrook woman said on the tape. "Because for one hour a week, I was held by a priest in a dark stairwell. Or sat on your lap in a dark classroom."

The man she confronted sounded bewildered. He said he had no memory of her whatsoever. And he kept returning to the message she had left on the diocesan sex abuse hotline Jan. 9 accusing him of "molestation," though she would make no claim that the priest had sexually assaulted her.

"I can't connect or relate to charges of molestation," protested the man who had just introduced himself on the tape as Logan. "I have 11 nieces and nephews, 34 grandnieces and nephews. I've related to young people as I have my nieces and nephews. There's no way I've molested a child."

Through the looking glass

So began a wrenching, hour-long conversation in which both expressed anger and betrayal, alternately accusing and consoling one another as they sat across a table in a glass-paneled office at Good Shepherd parish in Holbrook. She told him on the tape, which she shared with a Newsday reporter, that he had haunted her life. He replied that as a younger priest he had tried to console many children by showing "warmth and comfort," but he had long since realized that was inappropriate.

The March 3 meeting was a rare event -- one of the only times, the Diocese of Rockville Centre says, it has arranged a one-on-one conversation between an accused priest and an alleged victim. Although it shed little light on what may have happened at St. James parish school 26 years ago, the taped exchange is by turns emotional and strangely detached.

"Literally, I felt my life ended the day I got the call," he told McKenny. "I'm 63 years of age. I've worked 37 years of my life as a priest, and driving from Glen Cove to Rockville Centre [to meet diocesan officials about the allegation], I asked the Lord, 'Is this the end of my life?' ... I've been living in a kind of hell ever since."

McKenny spoke of her own suffering. "Hell can be a nasty place, can't it?" she said. "I've been living there for 25 years."

McKenny said she tape-recorded the meeting to protect herself. She said she felt traumatized after an earlier meeting with a diocesan official, on Feb. 23, when she was asked to demonstrate the way she said the priest had held and touched her. The tape offers a rare, behind-the-scenes glimpse of how

the church has handled one particular allegation.

And it gives voice to the torment not just of the accuser, but of a priest who fears his life's work is over.

A matter of trust

"If my reputation was an issue, I'd pack it in tomorrow," he told McKenny. "I could not possibly stand up in front of a congregation and have them say 'You're a fraud.' 'We don't trust you.' 'We don't want you.'"

Efforts to reach Logan through the diocese and relatives on Long Island were unsuccessful. "It's best for him that he not speak with the media," said diocesan spokesman Sean Dolan. "He's a distraught man at this point. It would be inappropriate for him to speak to the media."

Four days after his conversation with McKenny, Logan was suspended from ministry while the diocese undertakes an investigation into the accusations, Dolan said.

The accusation was made public March 18 by interim pastor Msgr. Donald Beckmann from the pulpit of Logan's old parish, St. Ignatius Martyr in Long Beach. "Father Logan has been placed on administrative leave from the priesthood until this accusation is fully investigated and a decision is made as to its validity," he said. Logan had been filling in around the diocese since his return a few months ago from a health leave.

The day after Logan was removed from ministry, a diocesan official said, a second woman made an allegation against him dating back to the early 1970s, when he worked at St. Lawrence the Martyr parish in Sayville, Dolan said. The second accusation, reported March 8, involved kissing and inappropriate physical contact, according to a law enforcement source. In keeping with diocesan policy, the allegations were passed to the Nassau and Suffolk district attorneys, although the cases are unlikely to be investigated because they happened so long ago.

McKenny has also requested the district attorneys look into how diocesan official Eileen Puglisi asked her to physically demonstrate how she had been touched and held by Logan. "She was trying to make Janique go home that night and say, 'I never want to go through this again,'" said McKenny's attorney, John Aretakis of Manhattan. Dolan said Puglisi was not trying to intimidate McKenny, but to better understand what had happened. Puglisi, director of the diocese's Office for the Protection of Children and Young People, did not return calls.

McKenny, who asked that her maiden name be used, has brought no claim against Logan or the diocese.

'The squeak of his shoes'

In McKenny's telling of the story, the years leading up to her confrontation with Logan were torturous. The 39-year-old mother of two described how a neighbor had brought her -- an adolescent having problems at home -- to see Logan.

Soon after, she said he began coming to her confirmation class every week, tapping on the window and motioning to the teacher to send her out. "I would hear the squeak of his shoes coming down the hallway, and my stomach would get all upset."

He would take her to the school's unused south stairwell, she said, and hold her in an hour-long embrace. If they ran into anyone, he'd lead her to a dark, empty classroom or to a basement auditorium where he asked her to sit on his lap, her feet touching the floor. She said the physical contact never advanced beyond that. Over the course of an hour, she said, he offered "spiritual guidance," telling her not to worry about her conflicts with her parents and that God would take care of everything.

"I never reported back to the classroom," McKenny said. "After the hour would go by, he would tell me not to tell my parents that I hadn't been to class."

McKenny said the encounters made her feel dirty and ashamed. She said hardly a day went by that she did not think about it. But over the years, she confided in no one.

Then, last November, after signing on to teach catechism to her 7-year-old son's class, she took the diocese's mandatory training program about child sex abuse. As McKenny watched a film in which priest molesters talked about how they got children to trust them, how they took them to secluded and dark places, she said she felt sick. "I was like, 'Oh my God.'"

For weeks, she said, she couldn't sleep. She cried all the time. And it was then she went to a parish priest, the Rev. Frank Nelson, and asked him to hear her confession. Nelson and her pastor sat with her as she telephoned her complaint to the diocesan sex-abuse hotline.

She met several weeks later with Puglisi and told her she wanted to speak to Logan face-to-face. She said she had to know if there were others like her, and make sure he would not harm anyone else.

"Eileen made it happen in a few days," Nelson said. "The reasoning was, if the priest agreed and it might bring peace and resolution, why not?"

But when Logan walked through the door at 10:07 on March 3, wearing a hat and sunglasses, McKenny was shocked. "He was much slighter than I remember. But I was 13 the last time I saw him, and whatever height he was had made a big difference then."

Puglisi can be heard introducing the two to each other on the tape as if they were strangers, and then asked pointedly: "Do you know one another?"

"We've met, yes," McKenny said. "I don't know if he remembers me, but we've met."

"But you recognize Father?" Puglisi pressed her.

"Yes," McKenny said. "If you take your sunglasses off, I'd definitely remember you."

He removed the glasses, and she said with certainty, "I remember."

The encounter began awkwardly. After Puglisi left the room, McKenny suggested telling some stories to jog his memory, adding, "I'm sure a lot of this has been run by you anyway."

"No, not a thing has been run by me," he said.

"I've got to be honest with you," she said. "The church is your employer. I'm a little skeptical."

"Nothing has been run by me as God is my witness," he insisted. "Short of the death of my parents and my two nephews in the World Trade Center, I can't think of a worse hell I've been in. I don't know what I could have done to hurt you. I believe that all I've tried to do with young people is to be helpful. ... But I'm here to listen."

"I appreciate that," she said.

"And if I can help in any way, I will," he said.

And so she began, sharing her recollections about the stairwell embraces and encounters in empty classrooms, and how the way it made her feel "Screws a kid up big time," she said angrily. "Gives you an overwhelming sense of guilt. ... It's like a snowball going downhill and it gets bigger and bigger, destroying everything in its path."

Slowly, the tone of the conversation shifted. Although he continued to say he couldn't remember her, he expressed horror at the depth of her pain. "What you're telling me is obviously new information for me," he said. "It did not occur to me that anything that I did would cause such upset for anyone. ... To learn that what I did has caused someone harm is absolutely devastating."

He told her how he had been encouraged by parents at St. James parish in the late 1970s and early '80s "to be warmer and more open" to children.

'A gross mistake'

"I guess I look back on that now," he said, "in light of what we've been through as a church and what all of us have experienced, and I would acknowledge to you that I think that was a mistake. That was a gross mistake. I think that what seemed an expression of warmth or comforting was, in retrospect, absolutely inappropriate."

Now, he said, he wouldn't even meet with a child alone.

For a moment, they seemed almost poised to reconcile. But then, McKenny demanded why he was still in ministry three months after her allegation had been made.

He sighed deeply. "You can understand that I'm praying my ministry has not come to an end," he said. "I know I don't have a right to say this, but I can assure you that there's no danger to anyone."

He told her how he lost two nephews in the Sept. 11 attacks. How his mother died two years ago. How he had a heart attack in September of last year. "My life has been hell since my nephews died and my mother died," he said. "My thought right now is not for myself but for my family and for all the people who have ever trusted or believed in me."

She softened now, saying she wasn't an unreasonable woman. But still, she needed to make sure that what happened to her would never happen to anyone else.

"Then my word will not suffice to that?" he asked.

"I have to be honest with you," she said. "I hope you wouldn't be lying. But the human condition causes us as a defense mechanism to lie. You're a priest. You're not a saint."

He sighed and told her he understood. "Can you believe I never intended any harm to you? Is that possible?" he asked a few minutes later.

She said she would take that into her heart.

And then, suddenly, the meeting was over as awkwardly as it began, as Puglisi walked back into the room, this time with Nelson. "I hope this has brought some kind of resolution," Puglisi said.

McKenny said it might have for her, "but he doesn't remember anything so it's not going to bring any to him."

The man who identified himself as Logan broke in. He told Puglisi that, in hindsight, he realized his past actions were "inappropriate."

"I did explain to Janique in our conversation that while there were hundreds of thousands of young people I've encountered, and some to whom I've been asked to give special attention, what I may have thought was comfortable and reassuring at the time would be inconceivable to me today."

Puglisi asked if he gave that special attention to McKenny. He said he did not remember.

As they got up leave, he spoke with sadness.

"I said this to Janique and this is an absolute promise: I will bring this always to the Lord and ask for complete healing. Because I don't think just one conversation resolves it under any circumstances. And I'm sorry for any suffering."

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