



# Listening & Learning: Stories of Survivors

Hope and Healing in the Diocese of Albany

## Impacts of Childhood Sexual Abuse

as summarized by one male survivor, from Upstate New York, age 66

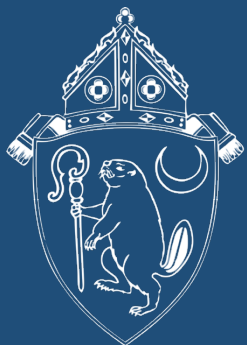
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Note: Don't be fooled with what's on the surface – I can appear all put together, yet under the surface there are many layers of strong feelings.

I have an inner ongoing cry for help but I 'project' that no one is ever there, so the narrative continues.

Mike K-L Impacts of child/teen sexual abuse:

1. Deep volcano of ANGER – (Under a surface impression of “I’m OK.”) I rarely let anyone know since I don’t trust that it won’t explode & hurt people. It can be corrosive if it is kept inside & yet it still leaks out in strange ways. My ways of dealing with it can be unhealthy: withdraw, pout, ‘I’ll show you,’ I tend to think “F\*ck You” too often in my head, both because of what happened & I don’t feel understood. In High school I thought: “At least I’m not getting cigarette burns, I’m not in a Vietnamese POW camp pit, with food scraps being dropped down.” Why does a teenager think these things?
2. At times I feel tainted, poisoned, infected, corrupted, spoiled, even if I feel strong & capable in life.
3. Hypervigilance: I emotionally ‘read’ a room when I enter, noting the exits. I note the # of women & the # of men in the room (rating, unconsciously, who might understand, who might take advantage of me.) I carry a big fear of public humiliation, since I was humiliated in private. I carry an image of me in stocks in public, nude, with passers-by gawking, laughing and pointing,
4. Daily triggers: fears of re-occurrence in dreams, ongoing self-abuse (internalized – in mind) via fantasies of what occurred. I have daily physical reminders when I undress, urinate, see myself in mirrors, being in nature, changing in locker rooms (places where the abuse occurred.)
5. I am keenly aware of my potential for manipulation of others, “pulling one over,” since I was so manipulated. So I always check my motivations. I promised myself when a teen that I would never touch anyone’s ‘free will.’
6. Mind-games, Mind-F\*ck (this is huge,) the **confusions**, twisted internalized victimization, unrealistic mental projections (being a ‘hero’, save the day...) Both attraction to and avoidance of images in mind.



7. Use food as a love replacement (for what I didn't get.) Self-comfort, sweet "treats" (were used as rewards during the abuse.)
8. Sexual intimacy: A helpful phrase from a therapist: "Yes, it was titillating to have someone want you, be so attracted to you." Yet this invades the dynamic of sexual relationship, hoping for that level of attention (perverse.)
9. Money: extreme scarcity with myself, even while try to be generous with others. If I save a penny, don't have to work for it. I can do with so little, almost a 'concentration camp' mentality (feeling of being "trapped" back then.) Getting good "deals"/bargains - so won't be "trapped" in the future.
10. Time: I never want to waste time; impatient to race through things so will eventually have "relaxed time" with someone else who's relaxed (spouse, friends, children,) but rarely let guard down to relax.
11. Relationship intimacy - very hard to share deeper personal things unless I feel safe, but I WANT to keep things **real** at the same time. I want to connect with people but I'm scared to connect w/ people...
12. Emotional literacy - not in tune w/ what I'm feeling, not share what I'm really feeling, numb out. Unsure of what my real needs are, what has been 'infected' with the manipulation of perpetrators.
13. I carry a "Long-suffering" stance: ability to put up with BS for a long time, 'get through it' - long-term horizon. "I can outlast you, out-wait you." I am a long-distance runner/swimmer, but yet am sitting on deep anger; and then resentment builds since my real needs aren't being met.
14. Accommodation patterns: I let others get their preferences; co-dependence, people pleasing behaviors even when I disagree, ('be nice') I run a "protection racket" so others won't have strong feelings in reaction to me, if I express my preferences/opinions. I'm slowly breaking this habit, thankfully, but it still runs.
15. Self-comforting/self-medicating behaviors, get 'treats' when feel low or feel victimized (when have strong feelings, or when bored.)
16. Cut corners in various ways, "skating" the edge (lightly break rules to give a 'F\*ck You' to society, anger) playing games with life, since I 'deserve' some things since I got hurt & no one understands.
17. Victim patterns (feel that if others 'only knew' what I've been through, they'd cut me more slack)
18. I can run power dynamics against others (bully, tease,) if feel cornered/hurt; that's how I was hurt.
19. Loads of grief/loss for the lost years, the work it's taken to stay healthy on this mostly internal journey. I'm very angry to even have to do the work of healing and

persuade people to help me, but at the same time I don't want to manipulate them, touch their 'free will,' so I feel trapped in 'waiting.'

20. I am very kinetic, active, to avoid feelings.
21. Body image: I wear baggy clothes, double swim suits, so no one will have a chance to be a voyeur, even in their minds, looking at my body. Catholic church denies that we even have bodies: sex = bad.
22. Not in touch with my own preferences/needs often. Don't feel safe enough to reflect/consider "what DO I want?"
23. Can be impatient with superficial conversation, since what happened was so intense. I'm longing for REAL, a true depth of human connection, but yet I lack the conversational skills to get to this with friends/family/children.  
  
\* I carry tremendous confusion about 'what is reality' (since hypocrisy seemed evident everywhere in my life/society, deception/duplicity/illusion.) "What's on surface is not what's below often." This translated to surviving each day; and giving the finger to supposed 'societal rules' & expectations
24. Boredom (while the abuse was titillating, it was also boring due to the repetitive activities/singular focus on viewing me.)
25. "Sneaky behaviors" (stealing, lying, cheating, having an 'underground' life of thoughts, feelings, behaviors.) The Catholic church sets this up with 'confession': tell us/God how you've been sneaky, but the church actually won't let you be fully human and fallible, with feelings, make mistakes, have needs.
26. Regular issues with authority (FU!)
27. PTSD
28. Thrill seeking behaviors, for brief adrenaline rush that I'm 'alive' (similar to what happened when old abuse occurred, intense fight, flight or freeze response,) also to avoid feelings
29. Shame: heavy internal sense of stigma, so stay 'quiet', silent. Don't make anyone uncomfortable.
30. Not fully committing to things, always have an escape route (figuratively) back-door, e.g., have changed jobs every 3-5 years, just as I got successful. Self-sabotage?
31. Positive impact: Fighting for the underdog, compassion, attention to issues of justice/fairness, understanding others in the victim role – everyone has hurts and I can be aware of that in interactions

32. Positive impact: Radar for and good sense of BS & honesty and what's REAL, true, authentic, integrity-filled, facing up to/discovering true self. Ultimately can't fool self.
33. Positive impact: Lots of humility, sense of courage against odds
34. Shallow breathing; I've never understood what people meant by 'breathe deeply, into your diaphragm' due to chronic hypervigilance/panic
35. Notice an internal narrative running pretty steadily, probably related to being gazed at for so long & maybe tied to early Catholicism "God is always watching you."
36. Was in survival mode for so long, I missed cultural education; so I learned to not 'care' about most topics of social conversation (sports, music) since what happened was intense & most conversations are light, on the surface.
37. Easily distracted from my own center/grounding: like a raven "by bright, shiny objects" -figuratively
38. Meaning making; my mind tries to make meaning of the meaningless: wake up in a panic when I may feel trapped & my mind whirs to create meaning, somehow create a narrative of meaning

10/25/23: Where am I now?

- Gaining confidence in being in touch with my feelings and sharing them, while being judicious
- Gaining confidence in using all of my life experiences and competencies for a new direction of my own choosing
- Slowing down and paying attention to where my attention is being drawn and making a choice from my own center

Thanks for listening.