

My name is Kathy Rector. I am a wife, mother, and Registered Nurse and Survivor of clergy abuse living in Southington. At present I am a Co-Leader for SNAP CT (Survivor's Network of those Abused by Priests). I've lived in Connecticut since 1978; I grew up in the Springfield Massachusetts area.

I came from a family of "true believer" Catholics, attending 12 years of Catholic schooling. My family was active in our parish church: Dad was a lector and teacher of Catechism classes; Mom worked as a housekeeper at the rectory; my sister helped to count donated money after Sunday Masses; I was in the Children's Choir. My two brothers entered the Seminary for the Congregation of the Passionists Order in Dunkirk, N.Y. as freshmen in high school; at the time I was in second grade. We were frequently at WWLP studios, Channel 22 in Agawam for the live broadcast of Sunday Mass by the Passionists from Our Lady of Sorrows Monastery in West Springfield.

In approximately 1964 or 1965, Fr. Vernon Kelly C.P., a new Vocational director came to the West Springfield Monastery; his job in part was to recruit 7th and 8th grade boys who were interested in the priesthood for the seminary. He was informed by the priest who had recruited my brothers that my parents had two boys in the seminary, so he had regular contact with my parents to have them reassure and share their experience with parents of potential seminarians. Many parents, including my own, were reluctant to send their boys so far away from home, especially at such a young age.

Fr. Vernon befriended my parents and I recall seeing him somewhat regularly at my house, or at the Monastery for masses or other gatherings in West Springfield or at Holy Family Monastery in West Hartford where my older brother was attending Jr. College.

On July 15, 1965 I was invited to go swimming with Fr. Vernon, and bring a friend. The rationale given to me by my parents was that Fr. Vernon knew a boy from a different section of my town who showed some interest in joining the seminary; his sister and he were also invited to go swimming with my friend and me. I was basically there to make the situation more kid-friendly so Fr. Vernon could "woo" this boy toward his interest in the priesthood. My friend opted out at the last minute.

Fr. Vernon sexually abused me and murdered my soul that day at a local pond in South Hadley, MA five days shy of my 12th birthday. During the abuse, I had what I now know to be a dissociative experience, that is, in order to cope with this traumatic experience I escaped by "leaving my body" and observed from above. I was frozen, numb, unable to move or feel, anesthetized from the head down. Thereafter I have little recollection of the other two kids; he could have very well abused them also. I only remember later sitting on the beach in shock, wrapped tightly in a towel, freezing cold and shaking, dying to be home. It was many years later before I even had a word to describe the experience; the closest feelings I related to were those of a rape victim but eventually, I knew that I wasn't raped or at least had no recollection. What I did recall, I pretty much have recalled since that day.

I chose not to tell my parents. Even at that age I knew that their Catholic-instilled guilt would kill them. I was comforted by the thought that I knew they would believe and support me, but I didn't think they could handle it. On some level I also knew that by telling I would play a part in forever damaging their source of comfort in the Catholic Church. It was easier, less collateral damage, to keep the secret .

Over time, I did share with others, but they were not adults, no one who could really help...the oldest was college-age. No one ever said to me "that happened to me" or "I know someone else that had that experience". I felt very alone, very different. I thought I was the only one. For many years I couldn't talk about the abuse or think about it without "zoning out" and shaking.

At some point, especially when a 13 year old boy from my parish was murdered by a priest who had been abusing him, I wanted to tell my parents. By the time it hit the headlines that Danny Croteau's murderer was a priest, my father was deceased. My Mom was struggling with the concept of a priest being a murderer. I still couldn't "go there", she was still very Catholic. Later I also wondered "what's the point?" of telling her. It might be worse, so long after the fact, instead I had to "break her heart" when she found out I was no longer Catholic.

Now my Mom is 95 years old and has Alzheimer's; my secret can't hurt her. Since I joined SNAP after the Boston area clergy abuse scandal, I'm regaining my voice. I now know that I probably was not the last kid abused by Vernon Kelly, even though he supposedly left the priesthood circa 1966. I'm not comfortable with the thought that because I didn't speak long ago, that other kids were victimized. I can't change the past, but I'm not going to keep quiet any longer. Despite my discomfort with speaking publicly, if it keeps one kid from being abused, or helps another of the thousands of victims to come forward, then it's worth it.

Last year I reported the crime of sexual abuse that occurred in 1965. Almost two years ago I sought counseling specifically to come to terms with the abuse that I had "forgotten about". I am 53. My situation was not within the Statute of Limitation when I reported the crime. Survivors have turned to suits and settlements as a last resort to get some accountability. Most of us would prefer justice, our day in court, with the perpetrator named publicly and preferably serving time for the crime. We prefer having the perp on a sex offender list so others can be protected, possibly allowing the perps to get psychological help to control their disease. Criminal lawyers need to access Church documents to expose more names of abusers and the names of complicit Hierarchy who turned a blind eye to the kids needs by relocating the perps to more fertile territory and committing their own crimes in the process.

The environment really hasn't changed much until we have laws with teeth and enforce them, insisting that no one is above the law in our Democracy, not even the Hierarchy, not the Princes of the Church. This Bill for extending the Statute of Limitations, (preferably eliminating them), for the crime of abuse of kids and hopefully some day to include vulnerable adults, is not about the Power of the Catholic Church to micromanage our laws, or the powerful insurance industry lobbyists that want to minimize their payouts, it's about protecting children. It is about allowing children to report their secrets, the crimes committed against them. Reporting them when they get their voices, which often is not until long into adulthood, when it is safe.

Please continue to work this Bill to protect kids. Kids have no power in our society, they don't vote and they don't have money. They need strong adults and lawmakers to do the right thing. Please take the first step by protecting kids' rights to justice; please increase the Statute of Limitations today.

Thank you.