

Men Speak Out

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Alone in his room the priest would mastermind his hunt. He would examine his conscience as he looked in the mirror. He admires his body and hungers for it to be touched by a young boy's hand. He is reminded of his vow of celibacy but knows it does not work for him or for most of his peers. Many of them share stories of their affairs with the outside world and the temptations they confront daily. Few, however, speak about "crossing the line" by submitting to their carnal desires. At the fortress nightly visitations by young boys are frequent and are masked as "vocational counseling." The women gatekeepers bow their heads in disgrace, saying their rosary, as they silently watch these situations unfold. After many years of devotion, commitment and faith, these women are mystified by such actions. They dare not tell their husbands whose faiths are already shattered by what is written in the daily papers. The newspaper headlines shatter the myth that priests are infallible and remind us that they are sinners like us all.

One priest in particular was not happy with this afternoon's appointment. The boy was stocky about fifteen with red hair and freckles. He was asked if he would like a massage before the "vocational counseling" and he obediently but fearfully replied, "yes." He stood before the priest and was directed to remove his clothes. Then with only his briefs on he was directed to the bed. He followed instructions and was given his "special" massage. However, the priest could not keep his mind off Michael Iatesta, the boy he met last week. "He's the one I want on the bed," he thought to himself. "He's the one I want to massage." But the moment is now and the deed must be done. An hour passes and not a word was spoken. The young boy soon left in tears and the priest knelt by the bed for his afternoon prayers. "Bless me father for I have sinned..."

After prayers the priest tells the reflection in mirror that he is a man of power and that his following worships him like those who followed Jesus. He even thought of how Jesus was tempted and that eased some of his guilt from his sexual rituals. He cried out to the mirror, "everyone keeps secrets." However, this lasted only a few seconds as he was reminded of the worshippers anxiously awaiting his presence on the altar. His ego was stroked by how ecstatic they would get upon sighting his holiness. He loved the center of attention. He felt like a king on his throne. He would tell himself that they were there

THE FIRST OF 3 ARTICLES

The Beast is Silent



for him, and he was there to perform miracles. He held power over the weak, vulnerable and wounded. He was stronger than them. Without him their problems, illnesses, and hardships would remain unresolved. They believed by his mere touch the blind would once again see, the crippled walk, and those with cancer be cured. He doubted his very own intentions when it came to miracle working but the congregation believed and that's all that counted. He communicated with God by keeping his desires of the flesh veiled behind his consciousness. He read from a prayer book constantly to keep his thoughts focused on holy words not on his secret desires. For some reason, the Bible scared him, and it would tremble in his hands. The prayer book was safer, more comforting, less powerful.

He was a distinguished author of books and cassette recordings about healing, using them as bait to increase his selection of potential prey. He had set up a web site to increase his popularity and profit. He thought to himself "money for healing." His admirers gathered by the thousands, feeding his ego and adding to his choice of captives. He wore a gold ring on his finger that symbolized that he was God's servant. But deep down inside he believed he was no one's servant. He would always take his ring off when he engaged in his secret activities found wrongful by man, by the Church and by God. Whenever he walked down the aisle he would say to himself, "They love me, look at them, how could I be of anyone's harm. What would they do without me?" He also would take this opportunity to search for a lonesome stray soul that would require his intercession. His cage (trap) was empty, and it needed to be filled tonight at any cost. He paced around the room thinking how lucky he was to be in the position to have such a dedicated following. He said to himself, "No one will betray me; I'm greater than other priests; I have the power to heal. I have the power to cure!" With a twisted grin on his face, he said silently, "It's amazing what

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people believe when they are in such desperate need. Be glad you lowly ones; may your hearts be glad!”

“I must leave now in case Michael decides to come early. I will ask him to be my alter boy,” thought the priest. Michael mentioned he would be coming. This made the priest’s blood rush throughout his body so that he could hardly prepare himself to leave. “By tonight I will have him all to myself, he will be mine,” he thought to himself. As the priest walked down the stairway he could smell the fresh batch of cookies prepared by the housekeeper. He could not resist. He bit into one and smiled. The sweetness reminded him of the taste of the child he was about to meet. The child’s sweat so clean and so sweet. His scent mingled with cologne given to the child as a passage to manhood. He thought, “with that scent I could easily find my sweet child amongst the crowds of New York City.” He kept whispering Michael’s name as if he could be made to appear by a certain amount of repetitions. As he stepped outside, he noticed it was raining. He envisioned showering with Michael while exploring every part of his body. The priest gave himself permission to do such an act of cleansing because he was the master and Michael was his favorite boy. As the rain fell upon the umbrella, he longed to share this moment with Michael. Crossing puddles he could see his reflection and for a split second he thought, “Am I out of control?”

He crosses the eerie castle’s walkway and heads to the church. The congregation is full and awaits their mighty self-appointed king. He’s thrilled that the church is filled. He prides himself on the number of people in attendance. It assures him that he is a good man and loved by many, and atoned by their mere presence. He is the one they worship. He bathes in their praises. Their singing and chanting gives him a rush of excitement. The congregation began speaking in tongues as the priest stood outside the vestibule. The two alter boys by his side were new to the parish and he thought perhaps one day new to his carnage of innocence. He thinks, “The collection offering will exceed my wildest expectation.” He knew that the money was not always used toward the church, especially when it was beyond the average collection. He acted independently from the other priest and most especially from the archdiocese. He was given a license to do what he wanted and that included child exploitation. He was unaccountable—responsible to no one but himself. He had succeeded in manipulating the system to work for him and not he for the system. He placed all other priests in a similar category, one that concealed secrets of the human soul. He was a proud man because of the battles he won with the archdiocese. He reported to no one but himself. The Church authorities set him free because it wanted to avoid trouble and conflict. They rationalized that he was bringing in enough crowds and money so let him be. However, they also knew he had a problem with his vow of celibacy because of previous incidents of which they had become aware. However, the Church authorities assumed he would be safer outside the walls of a parish. They insisted, how-

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ever, that he attend a support group for priest with similar sexual proclivities. To this he conceded. Although he attended the support group, it was just for the sake of being counted. Even there he was conceited and felt above everyone in attendance. As it turned out, this priest had a previous record with the prosecutor’s office. Two other boys were once held in his power. How many more were unaccounted for?

It was time—the performance began. The music was loud and instruments were joyfully playing. As he walk down the aisle, his eyes glazed around the congregation hoping to find his boy, Michael Iatesta, whom he met several weeks ago. This boy seemed to have fallen into his trap, and he was confident that he would be at this service. Michael was young and innocent. The priest was able to hug him when they first met. When he

hugged him he knew then Michael was the boy he yearned for. As the priest arrived at the alter he became distraught because Michael was not amongst the crowd. The priest felt like leaving instead of going ahead with the mass. The mass meant nothing now. He was actually tired of saying mass and he only wanted to hunt Michael down. But this was the only reliable way to meet his prey, to feed his ego, and to satisfy his secret desires. He said to himself, “You have to go to the ocean if you want to catch the fish.” Was it not true that these services were more for solicitation purposes than prayer? It seemed that his appetite for young children had become insatiable over the years. It was coming to the point where it occupied his mind constantly. Even when performing the sacraments this passion to be with a child would take control, and he could hardly concentrate on what he was saying or doing. All he knew was his cage was empty. On his throne he eyed his audience but did not see his most important person. He said to himself, “He must come; I must have him tonight. I am hungry.”

While the choir sang, the priest was calculating on how he would capture Michael’s attention if he arrives. He was a natural hunter and smiled at the thought of what easy prey suffering children were. He would think how he used his priestly trappings to fool innocent children. The hunt thrilled him. He became excited at the thought of taking advantage of the goodness of a child. He could not stop thinking about Michael, who was introduced to him by his cousin. Michael was grieving his father’s death.

“He needs me,” thought the priest. “The boy’s wings have been broken. He came to me lost in tears. He wanted his dad back and could not accept that his dad was dead. Since this boy is in search of a father figure, it will be an easy catch. I’m what he needs. I will find him and make him mine. It’s essential he show up tonight and if not I will call him. I must have him tonight. I’m hungry for him. I need to embrace him, smother him with my kisses, and make him mine. He should feel privileged that I have selected him to be my chosen one. No one must have him except me. I will get his phone number from his cousin if he does not show up. Tonight will not pass without my arms around his gentle body.”

GRIEVING CHILD

I did not want to go, but my mother thought it would help me. She thought it would help me get over my father's death. I was scared to tell her the truth. How I was scared of him and the way he looked at me. I did not want him to touch me this time. I hated how he smelled. "Why must I go, if I stop seeing him will I grow up abnormal?" I wondered. "I will walk in late and sit in the back and perhaps he will not notice." Nervously, I walked in and he immediately spotted me. He interrupted the service and called out my name, and I thought, "Now I am trapped!" I embarrassingly walk up to him, while the congregation gazed at me. He announced me to the congregation as his "little helper." While everyone applauded, he gave me my prescription of hugs and a kiss on my neck. I became his third alter boy by default. His power over me was frightening. His power over me was hypnotic, and I was at his beck and call. I did not want the service to end because I feared what would transpire after his grand performance on stage. He watched my every move with his bloodcurdling eyes and would give me a smile when I glanced at him. After the mass he would wait until everyone left and would walk outside with me.

The church was empty and we were alone. I found myself trapped by the priest. He would paralyze me with his words, making it difficult to leave. He insisted that he accompany me outside despite my assuring him that I would be fine. He stated, "I would not want my prized boy getting into any trouble." As I walked out with him, I looked up into the sky and noticed the moon and stars. I wanted so badly to have my father come down from the heavens and take this man away and grab him only to drop him into the middle of the ocean. I wished for a set of wings so I could fly to heaven and be with my dad who left me a couple of years before. I wanted to hold hands with my dad in a forest, listening to the soft sounds of nature. I wanted to be anywhere but where I was.

As we walked outside the night winds arrived transforming the priest into a beast. His heartbeat would race and blood would rush as if he were a vampire on the hunt, thirsty for fresh blood. He was hungry. And, there, in front of him was his feast. It was as if he turned into an adolescent himself, where his entire body yearns to explore another's sexual being. He had no boundaries. He concealed his vows in a locked drawer in his heart where no one could break into his secret. At times he would fret at the thought of being caught, but his ego prevented him from stopping his ravenous hunt. He would sweat profusely knowing what he was doing was wrong. He would find himself losing control because the lure was too strong. He would lean against me on his car and mark me with kisses. I felt his body press upon mine. I could hear his breathing become more intense. I stood frozen and succumbed to this beast's desires. He began to lick my neck as if I was sugar coated, a lolly-pop. He kissed me and asked if he could bring me to his castle. I was trembling and said, "Not

I was his special boy



tonight." I did not dare to disrespect him but I was afraid of the cage. He would whisper in my ear, "I will love you even more tomorrow." Tomorrow came and in his castle he would again lock his vows in his drawer and begin the ritual of sexual experimentation. I stood lifeless while he feasted upon my body. I was only thirteen.

He was a hungry beast that fed on my innocence. He enjoyed watching me as I developed into a young man. He would fondle my private parts and steal from my virtue. He would wash me after racquetball while smiling, ignoring my tears. He protected his prey by isolating them from others. He trusted no one with me, so he kept me captive in his cage. I was his special boy. I was left hungry for fatherly affection after my father died, so in that cage he fed me with kind words and praises. He chased away anyone who threatened our bond in fear that he would lose me. He alone held the key to the cage. I often

tried to escape but feared the consequences. He was a monster with potent power that could destroy anything he touched. He had fangs that would draw the blood from my heart and drain my soul. He also had a large group of allies who would certainly spot me and bring me back to his majesty. They knew nothing about what lay inside the castle. His paws scared me. I would shiver when he explored my body with them. As he probed I would freeze and fly away somewhere peaceful, in the sky over the ocean. He would whisper in my ear that he loved me and that I needed a man's love to grow up normal. The beast would lie on top of me, telling me it was normal and "OK." I thought to myself that this was all part of the healing process and abided by his wishes. When I cried he would say, "This is why you need more of this." Sometimes I tried to break away but his control over me was too strong. His breath stunk with lies. His muscles gleamed with self-righteousness. His sweat was filled with the stench of treachery. He would smother me with kisses as if he were preparing me for a sacrificial rite of passage. I would freeze and allow it to happen giving up the essence of my heart and soul. As I said before, he was the hungry beast, and I was his fare. After his feeding, when he was sated, he would bring me to the cage and lock me in for protection. I was wary of his feedings of me. Confused, I would stand on my perch and think, "Is it my fault? Am I the one that's making him hungry? I feel dirty. No one must find out about this." He would walk away leaving me with memories of my day with the beast. I always feared for tomorrow. I was no longer a child; he took that way from me. Not a day went by when I did not fear his control over me. Sometimes I would hide under my covers and dream of a world outside the cage,

As I grew older I began to realize that I was too big for the cage. The world around me exposed me to realities of life that the beast had kept from me. The beast could no longer lock me in with a key, and he could only no longer trust my allegiance to him. However, as a free bird, I came to realize that the world was a lot bigger and the beast was a lot smaller. I knew I had to break away from the priest and become my own person. I was fright-

ened because for many years the beast had conditioned me to think that the outside world was a bad place and that living in his cage would guarantee peace and solitude. Keeping me from feeling emotions that all humans must experience was his goal. But the cage was purely a trap preventing me from experiencing the real world for good and for bad. Out of the cage I learned that sex was not a sin or ugly but rather a pleasurable act between two consenting people. When I began to have sex in college the beast scolded me and told me I was sinning. He must have rationalized the sex he had with me as normal behavior. The priest was ruined when he finally came to the realization that he lost his pet. He became extremely jealous and desperate. He panicked and would try to entice me by offering his niece up as a potential date for me. I wanted nothing to do with it.

Despite my liberation I was left with profound scars from years of imprisonment. The sexual and emotional torture I endured throughout the years left me with an empty soul and a bleeding heart. This one man had done so much harm that I was not as prepared as my peers to face the realities of this world. He blocked my access to God, corrupted my deepest belief system, tarnished my faith, mottled my trust for others, and made it difficult for me to be intimate with others. I also developed poor self-image, low self-esteem, identity confusion, sexual confusion, the early onset of depression with suicidal ideation, a strong sense of guilt and shame over the experience, obsessive and compulsive ruminations over the abuse, and reoccurring flashbacks. I have been hospitalized twice to treat these symptoms of abuse but remain hopeful one day I'll be rid of my scars.

FUTURE

The only way to keep these beasts from ruining our children's lives is to report them to church authorities and to tell your story to the public. My predator murdered my childhood, but I now have control over my own adulthood. No beast could take that

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away from me. The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priest (SNAP) made it possible for me to come out to the public. I stood in front of the press not as a victim but as a survivor. I told my story and spoke his name, and I am now a free man. My heart and soul feel liberated that I have spoken the truth and have no secrets. My bitterness and anger has subsided and has transcended into a yearning to help others face their beasts. I am no longer under his spell. He now wears the scarlet letter, and I hope he uses this time to reflect on truth and self-examination around his secret life of abuse, betrayal and sin.

As we all know these beasts run their own show. The church must do a better job with their investigation of these independent beasts. If not, more horror will occur, beasts will run wild and the last act will show victims failing to regain their lives and suffering their emotional, spiritual and financial losses. The church cannot afford any more bad reviews. What is needed now is a smash hit where the beasts are held accountable, victims are cared for, supported, and compensated for losses. The church should never ever again play the ugly role of the keeper of secrets. The real heroes are those empowered by reality to clean up the current stage and refresh itself with the church's new and improved image of honesty and trust.

Lastly, I regret haven fallen into the beast's trap so early in life and remain troubled by how closely he remains protected under the powerful yet shameful wings of the Church's hierarchy. Raised as a devote Catholic, who attended Catholic school through my Master's of Arts, I am often reminded of a Bible story read to me by my fourth grade religion teacher. She would describe so tenderly how Jesus gathered his flock of lambs and made certain no one was left behind, especially those in pain and suffering. As a child I was comforted by her words. As an adult, however, I have come to a sad realization that the Church's hierarchy does not call out to its lost and suffering lambs but instead silences them. For me SNAP helped to break the silence once and for all.

Michael Iatesta
SNAP survivor

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THE SECOND OF 3 ARTICLES

My Musical Career

I find sometimes that starting an article can be the hardest part. I have ideas for the story and lots of thoughts about what to say, but that opening line, and how best to hook the reader in, I find to be quite challenging. Yet I wonder if it is the subject matter itself and the reluctance to tackle it that cause this dilemma. Though I agree wholeheartedly in breaking the silence and speaking one's truth, it still can be a very difficult process for me. The urge to stay silent is still imprinted upon me mentally, physically and spiritually. So that in and of itself still has a very powerful impact, added to the affects upon me as a survivor of extremely perverted and sadistic sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. That abuse came from both of my parents and some of their friends.

Music has been a godsend for me and I do believe that it has helped to save my life. I don't voice that statement lightly, for until the age of ten I had my mind set upon a military career. I was bound and determined to attend West Point Academy, to join the Army's Rangers, and then the Green Beret. I wanted to learn all that I could about covert military action, become a proficient sniper, schooled in all types of weaponry. My plan was simple: to come back and destroy those who hurt children. First on my list were my parents and their circle of friends.

But then the Beatles arrived and suddenly a new path was opened.

Seeing the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show was truly one of those magical life-changing moments. They brought such joy and happiness into my life just from seeing them perform. Like thousands of others across the country I too wanted to be in a rock & roll band. Oh how I wanted to play the guitar and sing like them and be famous! Unfortunately, I shared those thoughts and dreams with my parents who immediately set about ridiculing and reminding me how stupid and lazy I was. Sadly I believed them and did not pursue that avenue.

Fortunately I had another magical moment, an epiphany while tapping along to some songs on the radio. I was keeping time and could anticipate what was coming next in the song. So now I had found a new direction to pursue, I was going to be a rock & roll drummer. This time I did not share those thoughts with my parents. After hard work and a lot of practice I joined the local neighborhood band. We became quite good and soon found ourselves in demand, performing at parties, teen centers, school dances, and the Battle of the Bands contests. Within a few years we were winning those contests and we had a steady stream of gigs and were making decent money and also having a blast. By the time I was eighteen that was my vocation and I wore the label of professional musician with great pride. Eventually the core musicians of the band went on to live and tour in Great Britain for two years with great success. Later on I moved into the business end of music and became quite successful as a manager and talent agent for rock & roll bands. By this time I was happily mar-



ried with five beautiful daughters and I was the owner of a company that made more money than I would have ever envisioned possible. I was living the American dream, besides having a great family, a nice home, and a successful business, I still followed my muse and my passion of playing the drums. I was a member of a rock & roll band "The Classics" who played out on weekends and we did quite well for ourselves. Oh, but how soon things were to change and not to my liking.

In 1992 things were starting to happen to me that did not make sense to me at that time. I have always been a hard worker and I did fit the typecast of a workaholic. I had been taking steps to slow down and become a better husband, dad, friend, and human being for several years and now at the pinnacle of success with everything going for me I was starting to feel run down, tired all the time, and had great difficulty making decisions of any kind. Feelings of uselessness and being lazy were becoming even stronger and the thoughts—memories—that I had tried so hard to keep contained were now coming at me quite frequently. They were the little snippets of what appeared to be snapshots of truly disgusting, perverse sexual activity between adults and children. I was repulsed, I was sickened because these snapshots had been with me for my whole life and now they were becoming a daily event. I loved and valued my wife and children above everything else and now I was sure I was becoming a pervert because these snapshots of the past were appearing all the time. All my life I have always felt dirty, no good, and so full of shame; now with these pictures coming into my head all the time I truly felt that I was indeed a sick pervert. Though I did not feel the urge or have never felt attracted to children in an abusive sexual manner, just the mere fact that these images were appearing were only re-affirming the deep held beliefs that I was tainted and no good.

So many changes were taking place inside of me and I was baffled and confused about what was happening to me. The physical things that I did for my peace of mind and health were also not bringing any relief. My involvement with the martial arts, swimming, walking, and hiking were not bringing about the changes I was hoping for. I thought that if I did more and worked harder at these activities it would bring peace. Peace was a rare commodity now, for my head was filled with clutter and confusion. I was making decisions around my music business that I now can see were a result of the depression I was experiencing. Each week had become a just-get-me-through-one-more-week pep talk to myself that things would go back to what I knew. This eventually became a daily thought process. I even had high hopes that the new year of 1993 would bring relief and a change for the better. But it wasn't meant to be, January 1993 brought on what I was working so hard to avoid: a complete collapse. I suffered a nervous breakdown. Sadly, those images, those snapshots of abuse

had now become a full-length movie and all that I had done throughout my life to repress those memories no longer kept them at bay. My walls had collapsed and all that I had tried so hard to keep contained and buried within the recesses of my mind came flooding in. I was hospitalized. I was not only benumbed from these memories of the past but also overcome with fears of what was ahead.

There followed period of time when I was hospitalized again and put into day treatment programs. Every time I tried to run my business I was lost, I was so scared because I could not function even at the simple task of taking a phone call. With time the effects of the post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD], depression, and dissociation caused me to be unable to work at my job. My business failed and this only exacerbated my feelings of uselessness, laziness, and being no good. But I was not prepared for what was to happen next. Up to this point in my life I had been drumming for close to thirty years and I was very good at my craft. I had worked really hard to be able to say that. I constantly practiced and never stopped learning all that I could about being a drummer. The effects of my childhood abuse were about to show me how truly damaging its long-term impact was to be.

Though I had come to the realization that my business was now in ruins, I still could take some comfort in the fact that I could start over and what better place to do that than by going back to full time status as a drummer. Those skills were still highly valued by many, so when I put the word out that I wanted to join or start a band I received several offers. I made my decision and then went to a rehearsal with great excitement and anticipation of better things to come. We started off with a song that was a basic rock & roller that I could ordinarily do in my sleep. But I struggled with just the simple task of keeping time. The next few songs found me disjointed, lost, and so damn confused. It felt as if I wasn't holding a pair of drumsticks, but instead I was holding a pair of 2 x 4's and one cannot play with any sense of rhythm and panache while holding 2 x 4's in your hand. I sunk to a new low. I did not know what to do. This scared me so much. Something I knew so well I could no longer do. It didn't matter to me that all of the literature and counseling I had received relative to PTSD and depression would explain this disability. All that I knew was that I couldn't play the drums anymore and my fears of what was to become of my life and what was I to do brought me to an even lower level of depression. How can you lose something that you had been doing all your life? I was not getting any answers. Even the joy of listening to music was gone, it only seemed like so much noise to me, it grated upon me. Why and how it came to this was beyond my understanding. The impact and the effects of

Sadly, those images, those snapshots of abuse had now become a full-length movie



the abuse and how it was playing out in my life felt as if I was being punished for the abuse. Though only a child and a young teenager when the abuse took place and that it was done to me, I still felt responsible and took the blame. The losing of my business because of my inability to work and now the loss of my drumming skills reverberated into my very core of who I was—or thought I was—as a person.

Despite 1993 and 1994 being some very difficult years there is a silver lining to this tragic turn of events. I kept trying at different times to tap along to songs on the radio or to albums when I could handle listening to the music. My sense of rhythm and timing were starting to creep back into my life, there were even times I found myself harmonizing to a song. This was quite profound and significant to me. Just these simple acts started to give me back some hope for my life. That hope soon transcended itself into taking a big leap of faith and a new belief in myself once again to entertain the idea, the long held dream of playing the guitar, singing, and writing songs. There was a lot of nervous apprehension and fears but I took the chance and took it upon myself to start the process of learning to play the guitar. It was indeed a very difficult and arduous endeavor. I was still limited with what I could do because of the effects of the PTSD and depression.

There were times when my efforts at practice were limited because of the dissociation going on and how sometimes holding the guitar felt like holding a block of wood and not a musical instrument. But I must give some credit to myself to help erase some of those old tapes of my being useless, stupid, and lazy. I have worked very hard at learning to play the guitar, sing, and write songs. It is with a great sense of joy that I can share with the readers that my practice efforts have paid off. I am now in the process of recording my third album release to be entitled "WAITING FOR A TRAIN". My first two album releases ("TRAIN OF TEARS" & "PIRATES") have been sold in every state of America along with several other countries. I have also set up a website (www.mskinnermusic.com) devoted to the theme: Hope, Healing, & Help for Trauma, Abuse, & Mental Health through music, resources, and advocacy. The site has now been visited by several hundred thousand people throughout the world. Through patience, hard work, perseverance and the support of some great friends I have been able to overcome some of the effects of my abuse. I have come to believe that it will be a life-long process in learning to deal with these effects but I do have a sense of hope again and that in and of itself will help to keep me going.

Michael Skinner

singer/songwriter/guitarist, advocate, educator.

141 English Village Rd. # 11

Manchester, NH 03102

mikeskinner@comcast.net

THE THIRD OF 3 ARTICLES

The Voice of Silence



As I remember most of my adult life there is only one thing I really wanted. If I could only have one thing I would be ok and be able to handle life and get through whatever time I was given.

I remember spending enormous amounts of time trying to figure out how to have just one thing. The countless thousands of dollars I spent with a therapist, the books I read, the tears I shed, all the time thinking if I spent enough money, enough time, then somehow I would figure it out. Somehow I would figure out how not to hurt anymore.

The concept of being happy and excited about life simply was never a consideration. That was too much to even consider, much less hope for. All I truly wanted was quite simple; to not hurt anymore.

My story of sexual abuse is the same and yet different from every other survivor. I was somewhere around four years old when it started and about seven when it ended. I did what I was told and never told anyone what was going on.

During those years I learned how to keep secrets, how to bury feelings of fear, sorrow, sadness, and countless others. I learned how to escape the pain by developing elaborate fantasy worlds and escaping into them. I learned to make friends with the people I created in my mind, and even today remember their names, where they lived, what they did, and the lives that I somehow thought must be the way life was intended to be.

While many survivors discover how to block the memories of abuse in order to cope, I never did that. I always remembered. But it was not until the years of puberty when I became aware of sex, that I learned just exactly what these two creatures did to me. Before then I had no words, no definitions, no concept of what exactly was going on.

It was no real problem to keep the secret because I did not know how to tell. There were no words before, no way that I had to describe to someone what was happening.

And at twelve and thirteen telling was simply not an option. I had had sex with two men. In the world I lived in there was no discussion about such things as abuse. I defined what happened as sex, and sex with men meant in my world that you went to hell.

Somehow life moved along and took me along for the ride. I made it through high school, college, and in all worldly definitions of success was doing quite well. But no one knew the truth. I would have given up everything for just one thing...just one simple thing. I didn't want to hurt anymore.

One of my own realizations, and one that I believe applies in one degree or another to all survivors, is the fact that the reality of the world we perceive through our eyes is simply not what the real world is.

The very nature of our human existence requires that we rationalize, understand, and define the world around us. In order for us to function and live in this world things have to make sense to us. We have to understand why things are the way they are and use that information to make the choices and decisions that gov-

ern our existence.

That very nature requires that somehow we make sense out of the sexual abuse we suffered. However, sex between a child and an adult does not, cannot, and never will make sense. It defies logic and understanding.

But as survivors we have figured out how to make sense of it. We have buried our feelings and emotions. We have built walls and barriers to keep people away and to avoid emotional and even physical intimacy.

We have done what we had to do to cope and most importantly to survive. We have often taken what cannot be rationalized and figured out how to rationalize and compartmentalize and explain away the devastating results as being somehow normal. We have done what we have had to do to shape our perceptions so we can rationalize and live with the memory and pain of sexual abuse.

Just as my puppies have no concept of color — dogs lack the ability to perceive color — we often have had no concept of life. But unlike my puppies, who have no choice in the matter, we do have a choice. We can choose to do what we have to do to discover who we really are, what we are really meant to be, and how to have a life filled with happiness and excitement.

We have all made choices and decisions based on what we thought our parents wanted, or what we thought our friends or spouse wanted. The problem however is our perceptions are not accurate. The world we have experienced is not the world we are supposed to be in, but rather the world we have created to survive.

And many of those choices have brought us all a lot of pain and grief. I think most every survivor has found his “drug of choice” to help dull the pain and be able to get through one more hour, one more day, one more year.

For some it is alcohol or cocaine or meth. For others it is sex or pornography. For some it is a variety of compulsive behaviors. The list is endless. But we have all found ways that work for us to cope. For me it was primarily food.

As I grew up I rationalized in ways I frankly did not at the time understand: if I was fat and ugly no one would want me. So I did what I needed to do to be able to look in the mirror and perceive myself as fat and ugly.

In my own mind this kept me safe. I was so afraid of intimacy on any level and most importantly any relationship involving physical intimacy or anything sexual was so frightening and scary to me that I did whatever I had to do to make sure that such a thing never happened.

To compound the situation I grew up in what many today label as a fundamentalist right wing church. It still confounds me somewhat as to why the church had such a hold on me. While my parents went to church and were somewhat involved, my mom was defiantly a “left wing liberal” and was quite clear in her beliefs. My dad was never too involved either and church to him

seemed to be more like something we were supposed to do rather than some deep and meaningful component of his life.

Since there was never any strong push or prodding from my family as to what my religious life should be, it is interesting to me that I became much more involved with religion than my parents ever were.

At this point religion served two purposes for me. One was a way to escape reality. It was much easier to be consumed with religious fervor than it was to face myself and see what was there. Religion also reinforced those beliefs that I was a horrible, sinful, basically unsalvageable person. It was very much a love hate type of existence, but as long as I was there I could hold reality at bay.

Religion provided some purpose, some reason to live. While I believe a spiritual component is a wonderful part of one's life and maybe someday will be a part of mine again, I walked away from it while not even realizing I was doing it, not appreciating how important it would later be to have distanced myself from my religious existence.

It is the unexpected, those events that we could never prepare for or anticipate, that sometimes become the most important. Those things that we promise to ourselves will never happen, but do, are often life-changing events, even when we don't recognize it at the time.

It was the fall of 1994 for me. That is when it all really started. That is when I began to see that the world as I perceived it to be was not the world as it actually was.

That is when I met the woman I would fall in love with and marry.

We all walk through this life carrying walls that we have carefully built. Walls that we believe will protect us and keep us safe. Walls we carefully maintain and patch as soon as we see any chink in the mortar.

I had never allowed myself to love or imagine I could love or more importantly be loved. In my eyes I was fat and ugly. Who could possibly love me?

But she did. She saw, I believe, things in me I did not know were there. She loved me despite my flaws and that just made me love her even more. She was the third person and the first woman I told about being abused. I actually thought that when I told her that our relationship would end, but it didn't and I loved her even more.

I wasn't doing a very good job tending to my walls. A hole had developed and life was starting to seep through. What started as a trickle would someday be a river.

We are divorced now, but are good friends, and actually talk more about "real" things than we ever did when we were married.

Of all the people in the world I do not believe there is another that could have touched me as she did. I do not believe anyone else could have pushed me and prodded me and loved me and cared about me as she did. Ever so slowly she showed me what life was meant to be. Oh I was kicking and screaming the whole way,

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but most things took hold little by little. And my walls continued to crumble.

While there are always many reasons why a marriage fails, I believe some fail because they are supposed to. Creation brought us together and I firmly believe it was no accident. It was no twist of fate or some chance encounter. For a time, for a season, we were meant to be together. We were meant to grow and learn and I was meant to see the world was not as I thought it to be.

She had two little boys that I fell head over heels in love with. They are my boys now and are as much a part of me as my arm or leg. I learned more about love after our divorce when they reached out and supported me and let me know they were not going anywhere.

My greatest joy and thrill is to hear their voice, see their smile, and feel their hug. They all showed me what life could and should be. I had to face all my assumptions about people and relationships and despite my efforts to keep my walls in place and keep my world in my control and keep it the way I "knew" it was supposed to be, they simply would not allow it.

One of my greatest regrets is that I could not be the man and the husband my wife needed and deserved to have. While she was the start of who I am today, I brought her a little joy, a few laughs, all the love I had in me at the time, which I know now wasn't much, but mostly I brought to her pain and emptiness.

I simply was not able, nor could I figure out how to give the emotional and physical intimacy that any marriage requires if it is to be a good and healthy marriage. I still was "fat and ugly", why in God's name would she want to be intimate with me.

This world is indeed a strange place. It brought together a damaged man who thought he was the most undesirable man in the world and a woman that is one of the most beautiful, engaging, enchanting, interesting, amazing, etc...etc...ever to set foot on this planet.

My wife was the very first person in the world to look me straight in the eyes and ask,

"Do you think you might be gay?" and then to say "It will be ok if you are"

How can words express what kind of person has the strength and fortitude to see in her husband things that even he does not see and to ask a question that could cause a marriage to end. While one first adamantly denies such a thing, since one's wife asks the question, it does cause you to think and question things you thought you had put to rest long ago.

I like many others struggled with sexual identity. But being gay was not an option. That was abhorrent and sinful and straight to hell you went. It was a choice only the worst kind of people made., those that denied God entirely and gave themselves over to depravity. That is what I believed and that belief was so ingrained that it seemed to be a part of my genetic code.

The first time I went to a therapist I went because I was afraid I was "going" gay. He was of course a Christian therapist and did

his job of convincing me that those feelings were simply a result of being abused and I was definitely not gay. Well that was good enough for me and that was the answer I wanted so I went along my merry way believing I was fine and that I had addressed everything that needed to be addressed.

Then I went through another gay fear stage and got involved in one of those groups that many refer to as an ex-gay ministry. They again affirmed that I was not gay and I once again thought I was fixed.

And then years later, of all people, my own wife had to go and ask me the “question.”

Another wall was in danger of being breached. Life was facing me square in the face and I did not know what to do.

Today I am so glad she asked me the “question.” She verbalized what I had always known, but was too afraid and too scared to accept. The only person in the world that I could honestly say I truly loved, and certainly the only person I was able to completely trust, told me it was more important for me to be who I was meant to be than anything else.

It is nice to finally be comfortable in ones own skin.

At about the same time one of the men that abused me was convicted of trafficking in child pornography. And I had never told anyone about him. Sometimes you do get more thrown at you than you think you have the strength or ability to handle.

The guilt I experienced was overwhelming. I became depressed, withdrawn, and escaped back into my world of fantasy, an existence that I understood and that made sense to me. I decided the solution was to kill the men that abused me and then kill myself. I lost most of my connection to reality and, while I could look at my marriage much like someone looking in a window and see it was falling apart, I could not bring myself to care. I had made my decision and now I was going to end it once and for all.

But, that was not to be. My doctor got involved and convinced me to get help. At first I fought and thought there was nothing that could be done. But ever so slowly with a little prodding and pushing and some good meds, I started to climb out of the hole I had dug.

While it didn't seem so at the time, all of the sudden really, all the things I had learned and experienced and seen as an observer of this world that was not mine, began to make sense.

Something happened that had never happened before. Something I could not imagine or grasp or entirely understand. Something that was frightening and exciting all at the same time. I began to get my arms around the concept that sexual abuse was not the norm. This was not the way it was supposed to be.

I began to learn what should have been learned when I was ten. I learned that it was not only Ok, but that it was a good and healthy thing to make choices and decisions based on my own desires. And the walls were starting to lean and the rush of life through the holes was soon going to be unstoppable.

I learned to question my own beliefs and assumptions and

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challenge them with fact rather than contrived realities.

I discovered that I had made the choice to be fat and ugly based on gross misinterpretation of the facts. I began to make new choices. I decided I did not have to be fat and ugly unless I wanted to be. And I no longer wanted to be. And some 90 pounds lighter, I am writing this after getting back from my daily workout at the gym.

I found that I was beginning to experience feelings that I did not know existed. At times it seemed I was out of control as I allowed myself to finally feel, to experience pain and grief, and eventually to experience joy and excitement.

In the midst of this new world and new outlook on life, my wife told me she could no longer be married to me. She said I was doing really well and I was able and ready to handle life.

The negative to unloosing your feelings and emotions is that there are feelings and emotions that aren't so pleasant that go along with loss and grief, sorrow and regret.

I had never experienced such pain and truly thought I would not live through it. I never knew or even imagined that pain could be so intense and so overwhelming.

While I knew on all levels that ending our marriage was good for both of us, that knowledge made it no less difficult.

But she was right. I was ready to handle life. As I have told her since then she taught me how to swim, and she taught me well.

I used to want only one thing. I only wanted to not hurt anymore.

But now, I want it all. I have tasted joy and love and happiness and excitement. I have felt the pain of loss and shed tears beyond what I thought was possible.

I see the world in color now and it is indeed a wonderful and exciting place.

I have been in that place where it was out of the realm of possibility to believe I could someday be happy and enjoy life. I believed that while other survivors could get to that point it was simply not possible for me. Once again my perceptions were wrong.

The road I have traveled to this place I am in today has been full of its share of misery and heartache. But I refused to stop and be satisfied. We have all heard people say, “you should learn to be satisfied.” That is a bunch of bull. I refuse to be satisfied. I want more out of life tomorrow than I got today. I never again want to assume to know what the world can or will be, but instead am determined to make it the world I want it to be.

Every survivor's road is different, yet much the same. There is no set of rules, no list of things to do. We learn as we go and hopefully some things I say or some impression I make will put another hole in your walls.

For me the steps I was taking simply continued to add up and compound and after a while the walls simply could not hold back the world any longer and that has been a good and wonderful

thing that I hope everyone that reads this either has or will experience.

I don't want to give a list of things I have done or even give advice. I got plenty over my life and frankly none of it did any good till I was ready. But there have been some things that have been really big deals and I believe crucial in becoming the man I am today.

I think the most important thing I ever did was to go to a MaleSurvivor conference and meet for the very first time other men that have survived sexual abuse. Despite all I had read, despite the countless hours of therapy, actually meeting another "real life survivor" was an amazing and freeing experience.

Another big deal was "going public." Telling my story, first to friends and finally to my parents. To this day that is the hardest thing I have ever done, but the most rewarding as well.

I remember very well and very clearly all the times I read about other men that had, as I defined it, reached a point where they were living a full and happy life. I clearly remember every time saying that could never be me. It is impossible. I did not believe there was the

remotest chance that I would ever be where I am today. There is nothing I can really say if you are saying or feeling that now, except, you are wrong.

It is that simple. You are wrong. There is a world that is a strange and wonderful and exciting place to live in. My puppies can't see it and they never will, but you can. Never stop, never be satisfied. Never settle for less than being the very best that you can be and embracing who you truly are. Sexual abuse did not make you who you are. It warped and changed the way you may perceive who you are, but no one, no matter what they may have done to us, can ever change who we are and who we are meant to be. Yes it is harder for survivors to figure that out, but do it anyway. Keep challenging yourself and your belief system. Don't accept what you think the world is. Make the world what you want it to be.

Never be satisfied.

Brent Turpin

Lots of changes around Malesurvivor: expiring terms of office on the Board of Directors left many vacancies. We have acquired six new members this past year, all survivors, and a complete turnover in executive positions. Danny Fowler, new to the Board since February is Secretary. Brent Turpin, who joined the Board last September, is Treasurer. The other new members are: Howard Milton, David Niederloh, Tony Rodriguez, Curtis St. John, and Stephen Vincent. Chuck Spence, also a survivor and a former Board member, has re-joined after a leave of absence. Continuing on the Board are Ken Singer and Don Wright.

We re-launched the Weekends of Recovery Program with two weekends already planned and registration underway: the first a Level I program in September and the second for survivors of clergy abuse in November. The program underwent an intensive evaluation by an independent consultant and the development of a policy and procedure manual, including rigorous training and safety measures.

Brent helped us acquire a new liability and "directors and officers" insurance policy that not only protects MaleSurvivor but also provides an institutional imprimatur to support our upcoming campaign for corporate-level contributions.

Two new vigorous committees — Strategic Planning, headed by

News from the President



Curtis St. John, and Advocacy and Activism, headed by Tony Rodriguez — are undertaking the new directive to pursue major funding sources.

With Fred Tolson's temporary withdrawal (because of family issues), we have acquired a new volunteer webmaster, Nathan LaChine, a quick study and a very dedicated young man.

We are now inviting members to propose their therapist for inclusion in our online Resource Directory. Contact the webmaster@malesurvivor.org.

We also are now planning to develop a professional institute where therapists can be certified to treat childhood sexual abuse victims and earn MaleSurvivor accreditation. Plans would also include: local agency training strategies, information kits for professionals, law enforcement education, and Training/info packets for teachers and childcare workers.

Finally, the next biennial International Conference is in the planning stages, under Ken Singer's leadership. More about that as it develops.

Best to everyone for a glorious summer...

Murray David Schane, M.D.



Members of the Board at the Spring meeting in Portland, Oregon

The Tricky Part: One Boy's Fall From Trespass Into Grace

By Martin Moran

Reviewed by Anthony D. Rodriguez, MSW, LISW, LCSW, BCSA

Clinical Director, The Men's Center

WWW.TheMensCenter.NET



The front cover of Martin Moran's book somewhat startled me. It was a picture of a boy standing on his kayak, wearing his 1970's swimming trunks and life preserver, holding his paddle over his head (either in triumph, surrender, or just hanging on).

The book is a memoir of Martin's abuse beginning at the age of twelve. When I began to read his words, I became mesmerized by his experience. He brings readers with him to the unadulterated complexities of his childhood. One can relate to some of the awkwardness, confusion, and simple enthusiasm of just being a kid. If you were schooled in Catholicism, you would chuckle (with camaraderie) at the rituals taught by nuns and priest.

As Martin begins to share his experience about the abuse, there is an unsettling feeling. The context of the words become raw and the reader begins to picture in his mind's eye each moment. With a quiet respect for the boy's experience, his memories are detailed. We are with him, in his thoughts, his confusion, his desperation, and, thankfully, with his redeeming humor.

He doesn't label events as violence, because each occurrence was cloaked with friendship, gentleness, or a sense of a one's own journey into manhood. Despite this, the reader can feel his confusion and the self-blame that was skillfully brought about by his abuser.

When Martin brings us into his adulthood, we find ourselves uncertain of our own bearings. We become a parent, sibling, or a friend who is sadly witnessing a loved one injuring himself. Martin becomes involved in a healthy relationship where there is genuine tenderness and mutual empathy. However like a recurrent fever, Martin finds himself "hunting" for the next sexual experience. He doesn't write for pity, nor does he expose the reader to gratuitous sex. There is no moral judgment. It is, what it is — an unexplained urgency. Perhaps that's what makes his behavior tragic — a desperation to connect, to explain, to find what was lost.

Martin is confronted by the innocence of his youth while dining with his best friend and her family. That night he crosses over from the abyss of self-blame to the painful clarity that his abuse was indeed violent. There were never any physical scars to speak of the sexual aggression. There was only a profound stillness in his very breath. In his understanding that all children want acceptance, love, and have an innate desire to feel important. Martin finally forgives himself, embraces his childhood, and reclaims his future.

Martin's journey is a human one. Perhaps that is why the reader can identify with his words. In a continuum, the book begins and ends in a graceful attempt to understand the meaning of moments. As I read the final pages, I am not left feeling "now what" or "is that it". I feel no sadness that Martin's journey continues. The truth is, sometimes there are no storybook happy endings. Life in all its

Book Reviews

serendipity continues, and for Martin, there is only new understanding.

I look at the cover of the book again, and all I see now is just a boy, being a boy.

Side note: Martin Moran was awarded a 2001 Fellowship for Creative Non-Fiction from the New York Foundation of the Arts. He won a 2004 Obie Award for his one-man play, *The Tricky Part*. For more information regarding his book and award-winning play, you can review his website at: www.thetrickypartbook.com.

www.thetrickypartbook.com.

Beyond Betrayal.

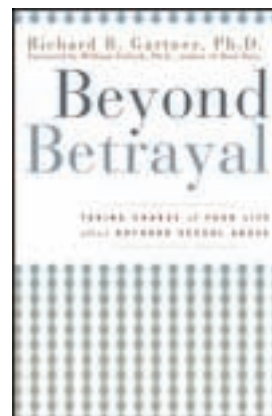
A book by Richard B. Gartner, Ph.D.

Reviewed, by Charles C. Spence, Ph.D.

I was delighted to review this new book by Richard Gartner who deserves the respect and appreciation of all those who care about preventing the abuse of boys.

This book is written for those who have been abused and their loved ones. It would also be excellent reading for professionals who are assisting those who have been abused and want to learn more about the impact of sexual abuse.

I read this book from the following perspectives: as a board member of MaleSurvivor as an individual who respects Gartner's professional leadership, as a survivor of childhood sex abuse, as a gay man, and as a psychology professional.



I will give this book to many adults I know who continue to struggle with understanding the impact that sex abuse has had on their life. They will learn a great deal. The book is very readable and interesting in its use of case histories to make important points.

I'm going to provide a series of direct quotes from the book as I think it will give a reader quick insight into the content.

On Betrayal:

"If you were abused as a child, betrayal is your life's core issue. It ravages your self-concept as a man, especially if the betrayal was sexual. It affects how you behave with your family, your parents, your partner and your friends" p 10.

"No matter what form betrayal took, no matter how seldom or how often it happened, it challenged and changed your perception of yourself as you grew into manhood" P 11.

On sexual abuse:

"If you were abused, maybe you grew up believing you agreed to it or were even responsible for it" P 13

On recovery from betrayal:

"It's natural to want to recover from betrayal, and quickly. But recovery takes time. It requires patience with yourself. It calls on you to forgive yourself for your failures, accept your progress and find ways to voice what you've never spoken about before". P 20

On incest and boundaries:

“Incest is perhaps the most psychologically catastrophic form of sexual betrayal” P 15

“If your developing boundaries were routinely violated, you’ve probably had difficulty developing into an independent, self determined person” P 44

“Incest is an extreme form of boundary violation. This criminal behavior profoundly affects a child’s personality, especially if the abuse goes on for an extended period” P 45

“If you were sexually betrayed, a criminal trespass was made into the sovereign territory of your mind, body and soul. Your boundaries were attacked. Perhaps you’ve grown up without fully repairing them.” P50

“Sometimes boys who were sexually betrayed will build psychological walls as they grown up that allow them to develop without exposing them to further hurt” P 53

On not knowing what you feel:

“It’s hard when you’re a kid to live an ordinary existencewhen you’re filled with rage and there’s no way to talk about or vent it without hurting someone else or yourself.....It’s too much for anyone to bear. Adults have enormous difficulty regaining serenity after betrayal. For children, it seems impossible.” P 54

“You can’t change what happened to you as a child. If you are sexually abused, it will always be part of your life story. But it’s possible to stop the self-destructive, self-defeating things you do to yourself and others as a result of your traumatic past.” P 62

On being hungry for love:

“If you were neglected emotionally when you were a boy and didn’t receive the love and attention you needed , you were particularly vulnerable to molestation. This may have made it nearly impossible for you to resist affection and tenderness when it was offered, no matter what the terms.” P85

On sexual orientation:

“Sexual orientation is virtually never a conscious choice. Whatever its origins, there’s no reason to think that sexual abuse is a major influence on it.” P 92

On consent:

“How many thirteen-year olds can even begin to understand the implications of having sex with a father, a teacher, a scoutmaster or a priest?” P 96

On pedophiles and homosexuality:

“While some child abusers may consider themselves gay, most pedophiles who abuse children consider themselves heterosexual. ..In a study of over three thousand incarcerated pedophile sex offenders, not one said he considered himself homosexual.” P 98

On abuse by a woman:

“If you were abused by a woman, you may never have found anyone who could relate to your trauma.” P 108

“It’s difficult enough for boys to understand what has happened when a babysitter or other female caretaker involves them in sexual acts. Understanding sexual mistreatment by a mother is even more complicated. Mother-son incest is probably the most taboo incestuous relationship.” P 116

On avoiding intimacy:

“Any relationship may produce anxiety for you if you were sexually abused as a boy. Maybe you try to avoid anxiety by keeping all

relationships as distant, formal and emotionless as possible.” P 130

On being responsible:

“Boys usually feel they’re responsible for themselves or that they ought to be. So it’s not surprising that boys often feel responsible for their abuse. Maybe you feel you were to blame because you were interested in sex, or were vulnerable to predators, or were deficient in some important way.” P 133

On your attitudes about sex:

“Ambivalence about sex can be troubling, confusing, and discouraging. It may make you think you’re crazy, perverted , or hopelessly flawed. You don’t have to stay stuck in this place, however. The healing process involves a whole series of discoveries, insights and realizations. It takes time to assimilate new perspectives and understandings of what happened and how it affected you.” P 137

“If you were sexually abused, you may have trouble distinguishing between sex, love, nurturance, affection and abuse.” P 139

On taking charge:

“Part of recovery is sorting out what you are and aren’t responsible for. Equally important is looking back to your childhood and seeing what you were and weren’t responsible for then.” P 157

Dr. Gartner concludes the book with self-help suggestions and strategies on finding a good therapist. He also focuses on the family of the sexually abused and how they could help the adult continue to heal.

In conclusion, this book adds to our body of knowledge and it will be very helpful to adults who continue to struggle with the impact of sex abuse. It will also be helpful for the professional who wants to be more competent on this issue. We are all grateful Richard Gartner for his insights.

How to Reach Us:

Telephone:
1-800-738-4181

Web: www.malesurvivor.org

Address:
MaleSurvivor (USA)
PMB 103
5505 Connecticut Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20015-2501

MaleSurvivor (Canada)
c/o BCSMSSA
1252 Burrard Street
Suite 202
Vancouver, BC V6Z1Z1
Canada

