

Survivor, name redacted

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Written by her daughter Susan M. Bruhl (nee Dragert)

David began working at our home parish, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church in St. Paul Park, Minnesota in the early 1980's as music director. Throughout my life Mom would often host priests, nuns, and Sunday school teachers for dinner at our home, so when David came over it was no surprise. He was in his late twenties, single, gregarious, and very anxious to spend time with parishioners. I was also part of David's newly formed music group, Emmaus, so there was particularly special interest with my family and to connect to it.

My extremely violent police officer father had left our family approximately a year or two prior to this. Mom was struggling to deal with her years of terrorizing abuse at his hands and as a newly single mother of four. I think she initially appreciated David's adult male company at our house, even though he was a decade younger than mom. In no way was this anything other than Mom being kind to the new guy at church who made us all laugh and sang songs especially for us. David soon became a nearly constant figure at the dinner table – and more. He stated often that he did not like living alone and dreaded returning to his apartment. More often than not he would end up sleeping on our couch for the night and returning to work at church the following morning. This went on for a couple years, thanks to my mother's tender, vulnerable heart and David's limitless manipulation.

When news broke of David's decades of abuse of women in June, I knew I had to add my story in support of the others. During this traumatizing time of reflection of what he had done to me, I reached out to my mother. I warned her that the NYT article, for which I had been interviewed, would be coming out soon. Because I had by then heard the dozens of cases of his victims tell their story, and because I knew how much time he spent with my family, I asked Mom if he hurt her as well.

She immediately said, "Yes, he did." I cried, knowing full well how vulnerable she was during those fragile years. I said how sorry I was to hear that and asked if she would be comfortable telling me what he had done to her.

She said (I am paraphrasing), "I'm not sure where you kids were, but my guess is that you were all already in bed. I was cleaning up in the kitchen when David came up behind me and forcefully pushed me up against a corner and pinned me there. He started force kissing me, saying how attracted he was to me and that we should take our relationship further. I managed to push him away and said that I didn't feel that way about him."

I asked if that was when David stopped coming around.

"No," she said. "I always knew he had his sights on you.

(my attack was roughly a year after this incident, approximately 1983. David's age is between my mother's and mine.)