

Susan Bruhl

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I was in high school around age 16 when David started working as Liturgical music director at our parish, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church. It was announced after mass that first Sunday that he'd be holding auditions for singers. My best friend Mary and I went together to his church office a few days later. Although it was clear he was far more interested in the superior talent of my friend, he took both of us on. The group formed with the likes of many excellent musicians, mostly professionals, unlike Mary and me. We were his first group, "Emmaus." A bit later my beloved cousin Barb Fritz joined us. It was a wonderful couple of years with great people, jubilant celebrations, retreats, and life-long friendships.

Shortly before David began working at our church my violently abusive police officer father abruptly left our family. My mother was suddenly single with four kids, me the eldest. David has a bizarre quirk in which he cannot stand to be alone. At all. It was not unlike my mother to invite priests and Sunday school teachers over for supper, so not surprising David soon joined our family table. He spent many, many nights at our house. Mom cooked him dinner, then he never seemed to want to leave. Often Mom would say, "Well, we have work and school tomorrow, and it's late. We're going to bed, David. You know where the bedding is." He'd grab pillows and a blanket, crash on our couch, and go back to work the next morning with the same clothes and unbrushed teeth. We kids joked about his bad breath and body odor often, but he had become very much a part of our family. It was comfortable, and he was fun to have around.

Although David was always overly affectionate, I never felt creeped out by him - more grossed out by his lack of hygiene. I had heard other women in our group complain that he had "hit on" them, but seemingly nothing they couldn't handle, or so I thought. He is also unattractive, so there wasn't a whole lot of female interest out there.

I do clearly remember one weekend retreat Emmaus went on at The Gainey Center. I was 17. After a workshop session or music rehearsal we'd have free time to go off on our own, explore the grounds, read, nap, visit. I was alone in a lounge area when David approached me. Like I said, he can't stand to be by himself for even a second, so this was unsurprising. He asked if he could confide in me because we were so close and I was "special" to him. He went on to share with me that a girl we both knew she had "wrongly accused him" of sexual abuse. I remember clearly that I couldn't believe he would do such a thing - and also 100% sure that this girl was not the type of person who would have ever lied. After baring his soul he asked, "Will you hold me?" I let him, but felt uncomfortable and stood up and left after a second.

In 1984 I graduated high school. We had a baccalaureate mass which featured the three of us graduating girls in Emmaus. Later David and many friends from church came to my graduation

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party at my family home. David had taken efforts to introduce me to the conductor who would soon be my music director at St. Thomas University where I'd attend in the fall, and where David also graduated. I was very close to Jeanne Cotter (David's wife years later) who was already a student there. It was an exciting time.

Soon after graduation that summer David called and said he'd like to take me to lunch to celebrate my belated birthday. I was born in November, so I thought that odd, but so was David. Being a poor 18-year-old, who loved her "big brother" I gladly accepted. I was also anxious to hear more about the college I'd be attending. He invited me to lunch at Old Mexico in Woodbury, which at that time, was the only option. I was thrilled to be treated to something out of my price range and spend one-on-one time with David. Although I have never seen him drink alcohol, he ordered for me a jumbo margarita, the size of a fish bowl. I guess because he ordered it the waitress didn't flinch that I was under age. During lunch he bought me another. And another. My teenage self was definitely feeling it.

When it was time to go, he paid the bill, I thanked him with a hug, and we headed for the parking lot. I remember feeling rushed to leave because it was raining and I was nervous about driving so drunk. Outside he wanted another hug, which I obliged. He then held my arms and said we needed to "continue the party" at the Red Roof Inn hotel next door. He was taking my arm to lead the way, saying he had a room ready for us and that no one needed to know. I panicked. There was no way in hell I was going to do that, but I was fearful that our relationship would be ruined or he'd be angry if I embarrassed or rejected him. I had seen glimpses of his temper over the years, but never an indication that he was romantically or sexually interested in me. He urged that it would be fun and give us a chance to get closer. I quickly said I had to leave, got in my car, and fled. I think I buried that incident deep inside, covered it with my self-loathing shame, and labeled it my fault. Was I flirting? Did I say something misleading? Did I just lose my big brother? What in the hell just happened?

I immediately called my cousin Barb who today remembers that conversation very clearly. I didn't tell anyone else.

From that moment on I pretended it never happened. Over the years we kept in contact, but college life, then a new career, then starting a family changed things as life often mandates. Living in the same town we'd run into each other, plus meeting at weddings, funerals, and music-related events kept us relatively close.

After my divorce, my kids and I moved to Hawaii in 2002. David began coming here annually for a conference for Liturgical musicians called BILAC. I loved those conferences, because my two

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worlds came together for a few days with old friends from Minnesota. David always played the big doting brother, and I the loyal, loving kid sister. We'd meet for dinner and catch up like family members do. He gave me a lot of attention once again as a newly single woman.

Around five or so years ago he started being very cold to me. I didn't understand it. He'd barely speak to me and wouldn't accept any invitations to dinner while he was on island. Another leader in the group facilitating the conference told me that none of the presenters were "allowed" to go out separately from their group, away from David. Something was definitely off, but I blamed myself. Maybe we weren't as close as I imagined. Maybe because I remarried. Maybe because he did.

Maybe ... maybe ... maybe.

Then a couple years back he got on Facebook. We connected as "friends" but he would never answer any of my many, many messages. He even came to Oahu without contacting me, posting pictures of his time in Hawaii. Very hurtful. I started to think that maybe he got so famous he just simply became an ass.

Recently when all the #MeToo victims started bravely speaking up I began seeing old tapes of myself in their shoes, especially while watching the Kavanaugh hearings. I remembered what I had buried so long ago. I can see with hindsight how he groomed me, waiting until I turned 18. I also can see he has a definite type -Caucasian singers with big breasts who didn't have a father at home. He waited until after I graduated, an adult. Although nothing physical happened, I can see through my teenage eyes that his behavior was predatory. Trust I had placed into the hands of a man I adored was shattered. That's no small thing.

Certainly, many women had experiences far more traumatizing than getting a teenager drunk with a lewd, forceful proposition. This man, however, changed who I was. My first husband was asexual – a safe choice to avoid sexual abuse, I've learned. I have spent a small fortune and many years in therapy, including the very intense EMDR Eye Movement Therapy for victims of trauma and PTSD. I can see how my experiences shaped all relationships in my life, but predominantly with men. Certainly, parenting my five now grown children was influenced more by fear and led with worry than I would have consciously chosen.

And my life-long love for the Catholic church, in which I have received five of the seven sacraments, has long been tarnished and severed. It's been thirty years since attending church or even deeming myself Catholic. Imagine the triggering trauma of being in mass and hearing his song, "You Are Mine." The lyrics begin, "I will come to you in the silence." Terrifying.