

## Victoria Radleigh Smith

Quotes from Catholic News Agency (7/2/2020), National Catholic Reporter (6/24/2020), and additional comments (9/12/2020)

*July 2, 2020 article in Catholic News Agency. Victoria is identified in the article under a pseudonym, but has since chosen to come forward with her name:*

“In 2002, [Victoria] was selected to attend a well-known music ministry camp in St. Paul, Minnesota called Music Ministry Alive (MMA). The weeklong camp brought in around 150 participants from around the country and featured workshops, peer groups, and a concert at the end of week, which Haas headlined.

‘It was very clear that this was [Haas’] program,’ [Victoria] said.

‘He was not absent in any way— he was present for as many rehearsals as was possible, he would drop in when we were in workshops or peer groups, at the end of the evenings when we would do our evening check-ins he was around, he was seated with people during mealtimes,’ she recalled.

‘There was a lot of touching, putting his hands on your shoulders, hugs— things that weren’t exactly criminal but were, looking back, notable, and what we [now] know to be grooming patterns,’ she said.

A few years later, at age 19, [Victoria] attended the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress (LAREC) in Anaheim, California. Haas was there, and after he gave a workshop, the two struck up a conversation.

As the two chatted and walked outside the convention center, [Victoria] said they ended up toward the back of the convention center where there were loading docks and benches.

As they sat down, [Victoria] told CNA, Haas suddenly kissed her aggressively and groped her chest. As she tried to pull away, Haas attempted to pull her head onto his shoulder, [Victoria] said.

[Victoria] was scared. She was in a relatively isolated place with a much older and larger man.

‘I tried to express my discomfort, but in a way that I would be safe,’ she said.

‘So I probably went along with it a little longer than I would have liked, and then I asked to leave, and he took my arm and walked with me back to where we had originally had met.’

She said as she took leave of him, he kissed her again, on the mouth. He also gave her his cell phone number and told her which hotel he was staying in, inviting her to visit his room at any point during the conference, she said.

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This invitation struck [Victoria] as odd— partly because it was so obviously wrong, and crossed a boundary, but also because she knew that Haas generally travelled with his wife. [Victoria] says she immediately reported what had happened to her, to a priest as well as to a friend and mentor who was a mandated reporter. She doesn't believe her complaint went anywhere— if it did, she said she never heard anything more about it.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles told CNA in a statement [June 30, 2020] that it is 'investigating allegations of sexual misconduct described in recent media reports involving' Haas.

The archdiocesan Office of Victims Assistance Ministry, which receives reports of misconduct, has no prior record of reports of sexual misconduct against Haas, the archdiocese stated.

Haas repeatedly 'friended' [Victoria] on Facebook during this time, she said, even after she deleted him as a friend, and he occasionally sent personalized cards to her home address.

Haas asked [Victoria] if she was seeing anyone, and she told him that she was dating her now-husband.

'The word I would use is that he became "irate." He was extremely upset by that,' [Victoria] told CNA.

'Mind you, he doesn't know my husband, he's never met the man...it was very out of character. There was no reason that he should have not been anything but thrilled for me.'

[Victoria] later secured a high-level ministry position at a major archdiocese. At that job, Haas' name occasionally came up as a possible ministry collaborator.

[Victoria] said she made it clear to her colleagues that she believed Haas did not have good boundaries, and that she knew of— without going into detail— instances in which he had behaved inappropriately.

'And I was basically told: "Well, that's just the way he is,"[Victoria] said.

'It's difficult for me to know that there are people that I'm working with that are abusing that privilege that we have, because we have an immense amount of privilege as catechetical leaders, and we have to recognize our privilege and recognize that it is a privilege to be in these positions,' [Victoria] said.

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'We're entrusted with quite a lot. We need to also acknowledge our position of power, and that we do exercise power over those that we serve. And we have to be extremely careful in our boundaries and how we interact with others.'

'What I think people fail to understand is that many of these women did report this, and we just weren't heard, weren't listened to, we weren't believed,' she said.

'Because it was brushed off as 'that's just how he is,' or 'boys will be boys' or 'it's not that big a deal' or 'well, do you have any proof?' And when you say those things to victims, and to women, you're not validating their experience and you're essentially silencing them.'"

*June 24, 2020 article in National Catholic Reporter. Victoria is identified in the article under a pseudonym, but has since chosen to come forward with her name:*

"[Victoria] met Catholic composer David Haas when she was 14 years old, attending his Music Ministry Alive camp for three years starting in 2002. It wasn't until five years later that unwelcome sexual advances tainted the relationship, when [Victoria] and Haas ran into each other at the Religious Education Congress in Los Angeles. Taking her to a more secluded area with benches outside the congress, Haas surprised [Victoria] by 'aggressively' kissing her and trying to put his hands down her shirt, she said. [Victoria], who was 19 at the time, pulled away and turned down his invitations to his hotel room that night. Several times throughout the years, he'd continue to seek her out when he knew they were at the same event through their professions.

[Victoria] said, he 'frequently would seek me out in different communal areas, so he constantly cornered me in the lobby, he had come over by the elevator, even called my room a couple of times.'

She said that when she was deliberate about only seeing him in public, Haas found ways to isolate her in conversation, at one point becoming angry when she said she was dating her now-husband, whom Haas didn't know.

[Victoria] said, 'My heart kind of dropped and I realized, oh, this wasn't just a one-off incident with me when he crossed the boundary; this is a pattern of behavior.'

'My understanding is that it is an open secret in the church community – I just perhaps was never privy to that,' [Victoria] said. 'But multiple people have said, we always suspected, we heard rumors, he had that reputation – something of that nature.'

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Now that she has learned that his inappropriate behavior with young people was an ‘open secret,’ [Victoria] said she is ‘extremely disappointed’ in those in church leadership who, despite the Catholic Church’s scandals of sex abuse, suspected misconduct yet failed to act on it, or still hired him for events, programs and retreats despite the rumors.

‘It made me really question how I view them as colleagues and mentors if they have not been able to speak out and advocate for those [harmed], because that’s something that we commit to as catechists,’ she said.

‘We owe our community better. We owe victims better.’”

*Victoria Radleigh Smith’s additional comments from September 12, 2020:*

He had access to permission slips, medical authorization forms, etc. that had our birthday on them. As a side note: I had an anxiety attack at MMA and actually went to the hospital. It was after one of the very emotional evening prayer services. As an adult, I’m able to recognize that there was this pressure to relive past trauma for the sake of dramatics, with no staff or adults offering a way to process those emotions before we were sent to bed. I believe that was the main source of the anxiety attack. A female member of the team took me to the hospital (possibly Lori, though I can’t recall), which would have given the MMA staff further access to my medical records, date of birth, etc. They also knew, in detail, about my past trauma and home environment – both from what was disclosed on my application, and that which was shared in the small peer-groups during the week.

He knew that I was graduating from high school and no longer eligible to attend MMA, as I had already been 3 times. He encouraged me, relentlessly, to register for the adult track. “Get your parish to pay for it” or “Apply for a scholarship” or “Reach out and let me see what I can do”. I remember feeling angry, like why can’t he comprehend that I don’t have the support or financial means to fly across the country and pay for a week long event that doesn’t really connect to my work or any other part of my life at the moment? I felt like I was letting him down.

He encouraged me to apply to St. Catherine’s or St. Thomas, which I did. I got accepted, however they didn’t give me enough financial aid so I went elsewhere. He knew this and was disappointed. I remember being so angry with my mom for not being able to afford St. Thomas because I was convinced that had I gone there, he would have used my voice on recordings.

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He added me to Facebook and would have known about my age and life status through that platform. Way back in 2005, you could only get FB if you had a college address, by the time they opened it up to everyone he would have known that I was at least of college age.

He would fly out to Congress each year and visit me in the arena while I was still in high school. Each year Youth Day had a huge rehearsal on Wednesday night. About 100 teens in leadership roles would be in the arena rehearsing for the next day when 15,000 teens would gather. He would usually be speaking at the adult day portion, which was from Friday - Sunday. The standard practice is that the speaker would fly out the day before (usually on Youth Day/Thursday). However he would come out Wednesday and sit and watch us rehearse, often times suitcase still in hand. At the time I thought it was cool that his first stop would be to say hi, even before he dropped off his luggage at a hotel immediately outside the arena doors. Now I see it as grooming and creepy.

Every time I saw him he'd ask how I was, where I was, and what was going on in my life. To be fair, those are pretty basic questions to ask anyone. If there was any doubt as to my age, education level, or employment status, I probably innocently disclosed that information to him myself. As I got older he would ask me things more directly about my age ("how old are you now?" or you're about [past MMAers] age, right?) where I was living, and my employment.

Immediately before he forced himself on me, we were in a conversation about my college debt. The whole reason I agreed to meet with him was to continue an earlier conversation in which we had discussed my return from college, my first ministry job, and the massive amount of student loans I had. As I shared with NCR, he asked multiple times about my compensation, if he could advocate for me, and that he might have some ideas as to how he could help. In that earlier conversation he clearly knew how old I was, and like stated above, had even demonstrated this knowledge by correctly mentioning other MMAers who were my age.

As I've been recalling these things, I realized he never once asked me where my mom was, who I was with, or how I was being supervised. I do know that he knew that I drove in to most CA based events (he would "find" me in the parking garage a few times) so perhaps he assumed that I was traveling on my own.

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I had an adult accompany me to MMA, and there were adults all around the arena at Youth Day rehearsal. These adults were safe environment trained and trusted by my parents. The problem is that he was perceived to be a safe adult. As a minor, he didn't have to isolate me because his presence didn't raise any red flags. He was able to groom out in the open. At MMA the adult we came with was part of the adult track. Adults were, rightfully, kept in separate dorms and usually were in separate sessions. During programming we were chaperoned by the MMA team who, again, were perceived to be safe adults. I don't blame all of them as I'm sure many of them were completely in the dark. However, his behavior continued because he was able to hide in plain site.