

Section III

The Sexual Abuse of Mark

While investigating the sexual abuse that Billy suffered at St. Jerome, we uncovered evidence that another boy, 14-year-old Mark Bukowski, was raped by Rev. James J. Brennan, Father Engelhardt's immediate predecessor at that parish. Like Father Avery, Father Brennan was assigned to positions at St. Jerome and other parishes and schools where he was allowed to work with children even though Msgr. Lynn and other Archdiocesan officials were aware that he had a history of improper behavior with minors.

The Archdiocese hierarchy knew that Father Brennan was a troubled priest with a history of inappropriate relationships with minors.

In 1991, five years before Mark was raped, Cardinal Bevilacqua appointed Father Brennan to the faculty of Cardinal O'Hara High School in Springfield, Pennsylvania, and granted him a secondary assignment as the live-in chaplain at Divine Providence Village, a residential facility for young women with developmental disabilities. In both posts, Father Brennan was known to have inappropriate relationships with minors.

At Cardinal O'Hara, Father Brennan and other priests took students out of class to conduct closed-door meetings, a practice that the Director of Guidance, Dr. Thomas O'Brien, felt the need to ban. Father Brennan focused particular attention on "David," a male student with whom he would frequently "hang out." One afternoon, Dr. O'Brien heard noises coming from inside Father Brennan's office, and then watched as Father

Brennan and David tumbled out of the office, wrestling with one another. In the words of other staff members at Cardinal O’Hara, including Dr. O’Brien’s secretary, the relationship between Father Brennan and David was “not healthy.”

During Father Brennan’s off hours, he frequently hosted loud parties, which were attended by David and a half-dozen or so other students from Cardinal O’Hara. Sister Patricia McCafferty, who was among the religious sisters responsible for administering Divine Providence Village, suspected that Father Brennan served alcohol to David and other minors at those parties – a suspicion that Mark Bukowski would later confirm.

The summer after David’s high school graduation, when he would have been 17 or 18 years old, he moved in with Father Brennan at Divine Providence Village for a period of several months. Apparently appreciating the wrongfulness of the situation, Father Brennan lied to the sisters about the relationship, telling them that David was his nephew.

Unpersuaded, the sisters registered a complaint with Archdiocesan officials about Father Brennan’s behavior. But the Archdiocese hierarchy did nothing to address the underlying problem of the priest’s inappropriate relationships with young people. Instead, it simply notified him that loud parties and permanent guests were not allowed at Divine Providence Village.

In April 1995, about four months after being admonished about hosting permanent guests at Divine Providence Village, Father Brennan met with Msgr. Lynn to discuss a possible change of residence. At the meeting, Father Brennan told Msgr. Lynn that he did not get along with the sisters at Divine Providence Village, and claimed that

he did not know why this was the case. Remarkably, Msgr. Lynn said nothing about the fact that Father Brennan was living with a boy under false pretenses and holding boisterous parties with students where underage drinking was suspected.

In June 1995, Cardinal Bevilacqua transferred Father Brennan to St. Mary Magdalen, a parish in Media, Pennsylvania (with an attached elementary school), where Msgr. Lynn knew the pastor to be on friendly terms with Father Brennan. Although this assignment was apparently granted as a favor to Father Brennan, he grew unhappy during his time there.

In March 1996, Father Brennan met with Msgr. Lynn to request a leave of absence. The Secretary for Clergy wrote in his file that the priest was “afraid that [his unhappiness] is beginning to show in his work and in a sense giving scandal to others because he is not performing up to expectations.” At the time, Father Brennan told Msgr. Lynn that he believed his unhappiness was a byproduct of sexual abuse he had suffered as a child – though, when questioned years later, he firmly denied having experienced such abuse.

Soon after the meeting with Msgr. Lynn, Father Brennan met with Cardinal Bevilacqua, and repeated to him the claim that he needed a leave of absence to deal with psychological ramifications from his own childhood sexual abuse. Cardinal Bevilacqua granted Father Brennan a temporary leave of absence, but noted in a memo to the priest’s file, “My interview with Father Brennan has raised certain doubts in my mind about his honesty. I suspect, without any evidence, that he is not telling the full story of why he

wishes this leave of absence. He seemed almost anxious to tell about his sexual abuse and did so without hesitation or embarrassment.”

What did not make its way into Father Brennan’s file in an official manner were the reports that he was living with a former student and hosting parties for current students at which underage drinking was suspected. In June 1996, Father Brennan called Msgr. Lynn because he was upset that other priests had been talking about his living arrangement with David, and suggesting that it was one of the reasons he had left Divine Providence Village.

Msgr. Lynn put Father Brennan’s mind at ease, telling him that he knew “there was a rumor circulating to that effect. . . . [but] not to be concerned about these rumors; . . . we only take the facts as we find them. Rumors are not put into personal files.” Again though, Father Brennan’s living arrangement with David was far from a mere “rumor.” It had been properly reported by the religious sisters at Divine Providence Village, who had observed the situation firsthand, only to be ignored by Msgr. Lynn.

It was in the summer of 1996 that the Secretary for Clergy reassured Father Brennan that the Archdiocese would take no action against him – that he was safe. In the summer of 1996, Father Brennan anally raped Mark.

Father Brennan engaged in inappropriate behavior with the Bukowski family before preying on Mark Bukowski.

Father Brennan’s first assignment upon joining the priesthood in 1989 had been as an assistant pastor at St. Andrew Church in Newtown, Pennsylvania, where he developed a close relationship with the Bukowski family, who were parishioners. Father Brennan

often visited the Bukowskis on weekends during his time at St. Andrew, and continued the practice for years after he left the parish in 1991, sometimes staying overnight with the family.

Father Brennan was particularly close to Mark, who was about 9 years old when the relationship started, and to Mark's mother, Patricia. During the visits, Father Brennan would drink heavily with Patricia, and then engage in classic "grooming" behavior with Mark. From the first visit, when Mark was just 9, Father Brennan invariably would bring up the topic of sex when talking with him. He also made a point of having close physical contact with Mark whenever they were together.

During one visit, Father Brennan became intoxicated and then conducted a physical examination of Mark's nipples, which Mark had described as sensitive. On other occasions, Father Brennan gave Mark shoulder and back massages. And on almost all his visits, he initiated wrestling matches with Mark and Mark's older brother John. No matter what the form of contact, Mark always felt that Father Brennan "went too far," until there were no boundaries between the two.

Father Brennan raped Mark Bukowski.

During Father Brennan's leave of absence in 1996, he and Patricia arranged for Mark to have an overnight visit with him at an apartment he was renting in Chester County. At the time, Mark was 14 years old.

According to Mark, on the night he arrived, he asked for a bowl of Captain Crunch, which he then played with, putting the cereal in the shape of a penis. On seeing

what Mark had done, Father Brennan said, “We can end this now if you want to end this.” Mark, not understanding what Father Brennan meant, answered, “No, it’s fine.”

As the night progressed, Father Brennan offered to let Mark use his computer – a laptop with internet access, which, at the time, was novel technology to the boy. When Father Brennan turned the computer on, he surfed through “sex chat rooms” and opened pornographic pictures. While doing so, he asked Mark how big his penis was, characterized his own penis size, and proceeded to unzip his own shorts.

Father Brennan then said, “I’m ready to go now,” indicating that he intended to masturbate in front of the computer and wanted Mark to join him. Mark said “no,” and walked away, trying without success to think of a way to leave what had become a horrifying situation.

A short time later, Mark said that he was tired, and attempted to put a sheet on the couch in the living room, but Father Brennan insisted that he come upstairs to sleep with him in his bedroom. When they got to the bedroom, Father Brennan took his shirt and pants off, so that he was in only a tank top and underwear, and asked Mark if he was able to get an erection. Fearing for his safety, Mark turned to a corner of the bedroom, with his back to Father Brennan, and pretended to attempt to arouse himself. When Mark reported that he was unable to achieve an erection, Father Brennan said, “Well, here let me see if I can loosen those shorts.” Again, though, Mark said no to him.

At that point, Mark was the most frightened he had been in his life to date. The 14-year-old started to put his sheet on a loveseat in the bedroom, but Father Brennan said, “Oh, no, don’t be ridiculous, your back will be killing you tomorrow from that little

couch. The bed is fine for the two of us.” Knowing what was coming next, Mark was so terrified that he slightly urinated himself.

Father Brennan, who was now shirtless, insisted that Mark remove his gym shorts and climb into bed with him in only his underwear, which Mark did. Mark attempted to sleep on his side, with his back to Father Brennan, because he was afraid to look at the priest. As Mark lay in that position, Father Brennan hugged him from behind, resting his chin on Mark’s shoulder and pulling the boy closer to him.

When Father Brennan pulled Mark toward him, Mark felt Father Brennan’s erect penis enter his buttocks. Mark began to cry, and asked himself over and over again, “Why is this happening?” as Father Brennan anally raped him. Mark fell asleep that night with Father Brennan’s penis still in his buttocks.

The next day, Mark reported the sexual assault to his parents, who confronted Father Brennan about the situation. Father Brennan admitted that Mark viewed pornography and slept in the same bed as him, but he denied that things went further than that. The priest claimed that it was Mark who had insisted on surfing the internet for pornography. Unfortunately, Mark’s parents, who viewed Father Brennan as both a close friend and a pillar of the community, accepted his version of events.

In fact, as subsequently noted by an Archdiocesan investigator, Father Brennan’s story made little sense. There would have been no reason for Mark to sleep in Father Brennan’s bed unless they were going to have a physical encounter. Nor would there have been any reason for Mark to become upset about viewing pornography, and report having done so to his parents, if that had been his idea.

As a result of the rape, Mark developed significant psychological and substance abuse problems, and attempted suicide.

At the time of the rape, Mark was a happy, well-adjusted boy who played several sports and had no problems in school. But the sexual assault by Father Brennan triggered significant psychological problems, including depression, which in turn led to a dramatic weight loss and left him so emotionally damaged that he was at times unable to even to leave his house.

In addition, the rape led Mark to turn to drugs and alcohol for comfort, and contributed significantly to a substance abuse problem that would affect his performance in school, damage his relationship with his family, and cause a crisis of faith. Mark even went so far as to attempt to kill himself by overdosing on pills before undergoing counseling and beginning to turn his life around.

Archdiocese officials continued to assign Father Brennan to posts where he would have regular contact with children.

The Archdiocesan Review Board, a group of individuals chosen by the Cardinal to provide recommendations regarding the credibility of abuse allegations and the appropriate action to be taken, submitted a report to the Archdiocese on July 14, 2006. The report, signed by Cardinal Rigali on August 17, stated that “[A]dults in positions of management and leadership in Reverend Brennan’s other assignments have consistently raised concerns concerning his behavior with youth.” And yet, the Archdiocese hierarchy did nothing to address those concerns and protect vulnerable young people like Mark from Father Brennan.

We have already discussed how Archdiocesan officials, before Father Brennan's leave of absence, chose to ignore the obvious implications of reports that he was living with a boy under false pretenses and holding loud parties with students where underage drinking was suspected. Instead, they simply assigned him to a new parish, where he again would be able to regularly interact with minors.

When Father Brennan returned from his leave of absence, nothing changed in that regard. Before assigning the priest to a new post upon his return in July 1997, Cardinal Bevilacqua wrote to Msgr. Lynn, suggesting, "if Father Brennan is willing to sign a release, that you would speak with [his therapist] for sole purpose of obtaining guidance on what type of parish and pastor would be suitable for Father Brennan."

The parish that Msgr. Lynn deemed suitable for Father Brennan was none other than St. Jerome, which would also be the site of Billy's sexual abuse. While at St. Jerome, Father Brennan showed little interest in many of the core functions of a parish priest, missing communion calls and openly admitting to his pastor that he did not like dealing with the elderly. Characteristically, however, Father Brennan took a very active interest and role in the Catholic Youth Organization at St. Jerome.

In May 1998, Cardinal Bevilacqua reassigned Father Brennan again, this time to Assumption B.V.M. Parish in Feasterville, where, according to a clergy interview with Msgr. Lynn, he became "involved with altar servers" and taught at the elementary school. While at Assumption B.V.M., Father Brennan wrote to Msgr. Lynn, requesting permission to enter a monastery.

In an effort to demonstrate why he believed he needed to leave parish life and isolate himself, Father Brennan attached to his letter a journal entry in which he had described a “primordial struggle being lived-out in a tormented state of unbridled passion.” He wrote that he had sinned through “the superficial, habitual actions and attitudes of a body struggling to stay afloat – of a mind writhing in pain, struggling to see the light of another day carrying with it the hope of some measure of success. And so I scrub my face and hands to present a clean man for the world to see; the filth and stench of my wanton failures of yesterday are washed away, as if I can, merely by willing it, put yesterday’s failures behind me to begin brand new today.”

Even after receiving such a striking missive from a priest with a history of inappropriate relationships with minors, Msgr. Lynn and Cardinal Bevilacqua did nothing to ensure that he would no longer be able to ensnare adolescents in his “filth and stench.” Instead, they allowed Father Brennan to enter an abbey for seven months in 2000 and 2001, and then welcomed him back to parish ministry, where he remained until Mark Bukowski came forward in 2006 to officially report the sexual abuse.

Three years after the rape, Father Brennan exposed himself to Mark at a time when Mark’s life was already spiraling out of control.

While at Assumption B.V.M., Father Brennan once again attempted to engage in grossly inappropriate – and criminal – sexual behavior with Mark. In 1999, when Mark was a 17-year-old student at Archbishop Wood High School, he was required to perform community service as a consequence of a theft he committed to feed his addictions. To meet his community service requirement, he arranged to perform landscaping work on

the church grounds at Assumption B.V.M., an assignment that he accepted because he anticipated that Father Brennan would be so ashamed of what he had done that he would look the other way if Mark did no real work.

Mark would later tell an Archdiocesan investigator that, on his fifth or sixth visit to the parish, he found Father Brennan masturbating in a shed with his pants down. Upon seeing Mark, Father Brennan said, “Come here!,” but Mark left the area and never returned to complete his community service. Mark told the investigator that he believed Father Brennan later signed the paperwork certifying that he had completed the required number of hours even though, in fact, he had not come close to fulfilling his obligation.

When Mark testified before the Grand Jury, he was reluctant to discuss the specific details of this encounter with Father Brennan. He said he could not remember precisely everything that happened. “Because of the trauma,” he said, “my brain won’t bring into context exactly what happened.” Even so, as the investigator hired by the Archdiocese’s lawyers concluded in his own report, “if Mark’s first allegation is deemed credible” – and we have deemed it very credible – “there is no reason to believe he would fabricate the second allegation.”

Father Brennan was removed from active ministry in 2006, after Mark came forward. His status as a priest remains in limbo pending the results of a prolonged canonical trial.