

The Story of Matt Cosby:

Combined from the 3-part article by Phillip O'Connor

https://www.bishop-accountability.org/news2004_07_12/2004_11_13_OConnor_SecretsSins.htm

<http://www.stltoday.com/stltoday/news/stories.nsf/stlouiscitycounty/story/0958D07B6CE7AD1286256F4B0062F52B>

Part 1:

Dinner, prayers, then sex

In the fall of 1982, Matt Cosby arrived at St. Thomas from Marshfield, Mo. The son of a truck driver and a homemaker, he'd visited the school as a seventh-grader and felt pulled to the priesthood.

He too was struggling with his attraction to boys.

Cosby met O'Connell his freshman year when he became distraught about a sexual encounter with an older student.

O'Connell told him the encounter was no big deal and to go on with life, he said.

Early in Cosby's sophomore year in the fall of 1983, O'Connell became his spiritual adviser. The pattern of asking the student to keep a journal about sexual fantasies and feelings began almost immediately.

Cosby would turn in the journal to O'Connell during the day and they would then meet after night prayer once or twice a month. When Cosby wrote about a homosexual relationship he was having with another student, O'Connell didn't chastise him or tell him to stop. Instead, he asked the student for graphic detail. The same was true when Cosby wrote a fantasy involving O'Connell.

Cosby was embarrassed to talk about such things, but O'Connell would tell him that it was normal to feel that way. The sessions usually ended with a big hug.

But at the session before the Thanksgiving break, the hug lingered. Then O'Connell began to grope Cosby, according to Cosby's deposition in a suit he filed. Cosby stood barely over 5 feet tall and weighed only 100 pounds. He wore a T-shirt and gym shorts with no underwear.

He'd remembered the directive from the Rev. McNally, who had graduated from St. Thomas and now served as dean of students. McNally had told the students not to wear underwear to bed in order to let their genitals breathe. It was healthier, McNally had said.

The fondling continued for two or three minutes in silence. Student and priest said good night and Cosby went back to his bed.

He was 15.

The sessions continued in much the same manner once or twice a month the rest of the year, and the abuse escalated, according to Cosby's suit.

That summer, O'Connell drove Cosby home from camp. On that ride home, they went to an anniversary Mass for a priest that required an overnight stay in a Jefferson City hotel. After dinner, they returned to the hotel. There were two beds. Cosby got in one.

O'Connell knelt down, prayed, rose and patted the bed.

"You know, you can come sleep over here with me," Cosby recalls him saying.

The 10 p.m. news was starting. The abuse did not stop until after the sun came up, Cosby recalls.

In Cosby's junior year, the counseling sessions moved to O'Connell's private quarters and his bed. The sessions often lasted until 3 and 4 a.m.

On other nights, according to allegations in depositions, O'Connell would sit in the darkened student dorm and fondle Cosby while he carried on a conversation with another seminarian lying in bed just feet away.

For Cosby, the priest's actions seemed normal. If the acts weren't, the priest wouldn't be doing them, he reasoned.

For high school graduation in May 1986, Cosby says, O'Connell took him to St. Louis for dinner at Schneithorst's, "42nd Street" at the Muny and sex in a Red Roof Inn hotel room.

O'Connell would continue to abuse Cosby until 1991, including when he visited Cosby at Conception Seminary College in northwest Missouri, according to Cosby's suit.

Part 2:

Confronting an abuser

In 1993, Matt Cosby told a counselor at Kenrick Glennon Seminary in Shrewsbury that he had been abused by O'Connell -- the first time he had divulged that information to someone within the church.

The abuse had continued relentlessly almost since Cosby had first met O'Connell while a student at St. Thomas, Cosby said. Cosby was 15 when the abuse began and 23 when it ended in 1991, according to a deposition Cosby gave as part of a suit against O'Connell and others.

In addition to telling the counselor, Cosby said he also divulged the name of his abuser to at least two other priests on the faculty at Kenrick.

Cosby said that, to his knowledge, none of the Kenrick officials he told about the abuse ever reported O'Connell's actions to other church officials who could have sought the bishop's removal.

In Knoxville, O'Connell had become a presence in the hills and hollows of east Tennessee. The popular bishop often called on the governor and other lawmakers in support of causes such as the abolition of capital punishment and increased spending for the poor. He also continued his rise in the church. He served on various committees and boards such as Catholic Relief Services, which allowed him to travel the world.

With his counselor's encouragement, Cosby traveled to Knoxville to confront O'Connell during Martin Luther King Day weekend in January 1994.

He asked O'Connell why he'd done what he'd done and whether he'd done it to anyone else.

O'Connell, through tears, denied the abuse. He said he'd only wanted to show that two men could lie in bed together naked and touch each other without it being a sexual situation, according to Cosby's deposition.

O'Connell said he did it to show Cosby he wasn't gay, that this type of behavior was normal. He apologized and asked for Cosby's forgiveness.

Cosby thought the explanation outlandish. To him, O'Connell seemed most concerned about the abuse being made public, according to Cosby's deposition.

Still, Cosby forgave O'Connell and they agreed to remain friends. He left Knoxville with the belief that he had been the only victim. O'Connell told him that he would help in whatever way he could.

Later that spring, depressed, suicidal, now open about his homosexuality, struggling with celibacy and other church teachings, Cosby decided to leave the seminary. He soon changed his mind and petitioned to be readmitted.

That summer, the seminary sent a letter that said it would be best if he not return.

"This past academic year was a time of significant self-discovery for you and I believe that it would be better for Kenrick and for you, pardon my saying what might be good for you, if you took the time to live your discoveries for a while away from the seminary," wrote William Hartenbach, the dean of formation.

Cosby felt abandoned. Rather than offer compassion and continued counseling, they'd simply told him to leave.

In late July, remembering O'Connell's previous offer to help, Cosby traveled with a friend to Knoxville, where he asked O'Connell for money to buy a car.

That August, O'Connell sent him \$7,200 that Cosby used to buy a Honda Accord. O'Connell continued to send Cosby money, including a \$3,500 check in December 1996 when Cosby told O'Connell he was having financial trouble, according to Cosby's deposition.

Cosby knew what O'Connell had done to him was wrong. But he says he never looked at the payments as blackmail. He says he considered O'Connell his friend.

Hearing the news

Matt Cosby had barely communicated with O'Connell in more than a decade when he saw the news reports about Dixon coming forward. O'Connell had abused Cosby over eight years beginning at St. Thomas when he was 15, according to a suit Cosby filed. Cosby was now 34.

Cosby thought he might be the other person O'Connell believed might come forward. Cosby had confronted O'Connell about the abuse several years before. He had asked for and received about \$11,000 from the bishop to help pay for a car and to furnish an apartment.

He'd believed O'Connell when the bishop told him he had been the only victim. Now knowing that O'Connell had lied, Cosby grew angry. He wondered how many other victims there might be.

On March 9, Cosby called a priest in the Jefferson City Diocese, Brian Driscoll. The diocese's priestly and religious vocations director, Driscoll had driven Cosby to Knoxville, Tenn., years before so Cosby could talk with O'Connell about the abuse and ask the bishop for money for a car.

Driscoll gave Cosby O'Connell's number in Palm Beach, Cosby said. O'Connell and Cosby talked about three hours later.

Cosby said O'Connell had apologized and offered whatever he could to help Cosby get through the situation.

In a second phone call later the same night, Cosby said, he asked several times how many others O'Connell had abused. O'Connell didn't answer.

Part 3:

(2004) Cosby, 36, lives in St. Louis, where he works as a medical technician.

Of the man whom he once loved and once held such a powerful sway over him, Cosby said he now feels only disgust and revulsion.

"He's not who he portrayed himself to be," Cosby said of O'Connell. "I see him as a sexual predator now completely and totally, and all the things he did good for the Catholic church will always be overshadowed by the fact he abused so many people."

Driscoll, the priest who had agreed to arrange a meeting between Cosby and O'Connell after the scandal broke, left the priesthood shortly after O'Connell's resignation. He has married and lives in Jefferson City. He declined to comment, saying he had been asked by the diocese's lawyers not to say anything.

In July, the diocese agreed to pay Cosby \$27,000 in settlement of his suit. O'Connell paid \$5,000.