

The Story of T.L.:

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:

For another former St. Thomas student, the abuse began in the fall of 1968, his sophomore year. The student, a classmate of Wegs, began seeing O'Connell as his spiritual director as often as two or three times a week.

For these articles, the former student asked to be identified only by his initials, T.L., to help protect his family and his privacy. Even when he sued O'Connell and the diocese over the abuse allegations, he used the name "John Doe."

Like many of O'Connell's victims, T.L. was struggling with his sexuality and his attraction to boys. During the late-night sessions, T.L. confided to O'Connell his guilt and confusion about masturbation.

O'Connell soon turned the sessions into discussions of sexual fantasies. T.L. said O'Connell told him it was psychological testing and that he was trying to help him.

Almost since T.L. had been born, his grandmother had encouraged him to pursue the ministry. While his second- and third-grade friends played cowboys and Indians, T.L. would perform a Latin Mass dressed in a tiny white cassock and green vestments sewn by his grandmother, who lived next door.

T.L. idolized the priests of his boyhood parish and loved the mystery and awe of the church and the priesthood. Like most of the seminarians, he came from a devout Catholic family who looked at their parish priests as men of God, a source of strength and wisdom, trustful and totally above reproach.

Now there he was, 14 years old, in his pajamas, late at night in O'Connell's quarters. The priest put his hands inside the student's pants, according to T.L.'s suit. T.L. didn't know what to think. Such abuse would go on for a year, according to the suit.

After T.L. had spent months confiding in O'Connell about his sexual feelings toward other students, O'Connell and the school's rector told him they thought he probably should leave the seminary. O'Connell then told T.L.'s parents why he was being dismissed. They were horrified.

T.L. transferred to a high school near his home.

On several occasions when O'Connell visited the area on church business he would call T.L. and invite him to his hotel room, according to court documents.

And then, O'Connell would fondle him, T.L. said.

Neither Wegs nor T.L. ever told anyone at the time what was happening to them.

But they often wondered about other students who received similar attention from O'Connell.

Telling a bishop

In 1994, another former student at St. Thomas Aquinas was living in Kansas City when a sex scandal involving a priest there prompted him to divulge his abuse by O'Connell. For these articles, the former student asked to be identified by his initials, T.L., to help protect his family and his privacy.

The abuse had begun in fall 1968 during T.L.'s sophomore year. The following year, T.L. was kicked out of St. Thomas after he confided his sexual feelings about two younger students to O'Connell.

Despite that history, T.L. maintained his relationship with O'Connell. The bishop frequently sought him out for sex until the former student was well into his 30s, according to T.L.'s deposition in a suit he filed against O'Connell and the diocese. T.L. is identified in that suit only as "John Doe."

T.L. in 1994 approached Bishop Raymond J. Boland, bishop of the Kansas City-St. Joseph Diocese, after a Mass, according to the suit.

T.L. said he later met with Boland in his office and told Boland that he had been abused by O'Connell, that they continued to have a sexual relationship and that he wanted O'Connell to get help. T.L. also said he told Boland about persistent rumors that other priests continued to abuse seminarians at St. Thomas.

Boland told him that the dioceses "like to keep these things quiet" and encouraged him to handle his problem directly and discreetly with O'Connell, according to the suit.

In an interview with the Post-Dispatch in 2002, Boland said he recalled being approached after a Mass one day by a layman who asked about O'Connell's whereabouts. But the bishop denied he had any discussion about O'Connell and sexual abuse allegations with that person.

Boland declined to comment for these stories. "I'm not making any more statements on this," he said. "I think this has been handled, hasn't it? I've been . . . sued for the past two or three years on this sort of thing and I'm not going to reopen it."

T.L. said he reached O'Connell at his residence in Knoxville a day or so after the meeting in Boland's office. O'Connell told T.L. that he was seeking help and that such behavior was no longer occurring.

Later that year, O'Connell traveled to Kansas City, and T.L. made arrangements for the bishop, whom he still considered a close friend, to bless his new apartment.

The sexual relationship over, O'Connell now acted cold, distant and guarded, T.L. said. Toward the end of the visit, T.L. said, O'Connell asked him, "Are we OK? Is everything OK between us?"

T.L. told him it was and that he planned to do nothing further.

They stayed in contact for the next several years by phone and mail. O'Connell occasionally would send T.L. money.

In 1998, O'Connell began to more routinely send checks, typically about \$400 a month, according to T.L.'s suit. The payments would continue for about four years and total about \$21,000, he said.

xchanging e-mails

Early the next morning, O'Connell sent an e-mail -- not to Cosby, but to another former student of St. Thomas Aquinas. The man was now 50 and still clung to his dream of becoming a priest. For these articles, the former student asked to be identified by his initials, T.L., to help protect his family and his privacy.

T.L. said O'Connell began to abuse him in the late 1960s while T.L. attended St. Thomas. T.L. was kicked out of St. Thomas during his junior year after he confided to O'Connell that he was sexually attracted to other students. Even then, O'Connell held a powerful control over T.L. He continued to seek him out for sex until T.L. was well into his 30s, according to a suit T.L. filed against O'Connell and the Jefferson City Diocese.

In 1994, T.L. said, he told church officials of the abuse and asked them to get O'Connell help. He also told them rumors of the abuse at St. Thomas. He then confronted O'Connell, who promised T.L. that he was getting help and that such behavior was no longer occurring.

Since then, O'Connell had sent T.L. a few hundred dollars nearly every month, according to the suit. The payments eventually totaled about \$21,000, the last coming just days before O'Connell resigned, T.L. said.

"Please know that you are in my feeble prayers these days," O'Connell wrote in his e-mail to T.L. "Please keep me in yours."

Almost immediately, T.L. responded that he was praying for the bishop.

"I am totally unworthy, as I have been all along, of your love, prayers and forgiveness," O'Connell responded. "Just know that I'll continue to help you in every way I possibly can, no matter where I am."

(2004) T.L., also 51, recently moved back to Missouri from Massachusetts. He suffers from depression. He's had difficulty holding jobs, but he no longer dreams of becoming a priest.