Anatomy of a Fiasco: The Culture of Molestation at a Catholic boys' School

by Douglas W. Texter (April 2022)

I first read J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* ten years

after graduating from Cathedral Preparatory School in Erie, PA, in 1986. Although I agreed with Holden Caulfield that there exist many phonies in the world, I didn't like the novel, which partially concerns Holden's experience at Pencey Prep. Holden was too self-absorbed and too elite for me to relate to. Many readers of the novel who liked the work were scandalized when Mr. Antolini caresses Holden's forehead while the boy sleeps on the teacher's couch.

Tell me something I didn't already know.

My all-boys' school, which has produced several NFL players, the accountant who exposed Bernie Madoff, and the nation's first secretary of Homeland Security, also harbored several priests credibly accused of sexual abuse in the Diocese of Erie. I was never touched. I'd like to say that I heroically karate chopped some predator or put his fingers in a mouse trap. The reality is that—unlike Salinger's elite Holden Caulfield, who was sexually approached twenty times—I didn't have the body, the face, or the wealthy upbringing that would have interested the predators. They just weren't that into me. My relative plainness and slight chubbiness saved me, and they also allowed me to be a fly-on-the-wall.

In spite of the good fortune occasioned by my teenaged physical blandness, I saw signs that were, in retrospect, flares. While I was in school, I couldn't name what I saw and experienced, but one of those later credibly accused of molesting twenty-five boys over a span of twenty years and mentioned both in a 2018 Pennsylvania Grand Jury investigation and the 2004 John Jay Report on the Church sexual abuse crisis made me slightly uneasy from almost initial point of contact. My experience around him taught me a lot about the nature of evil, which is very different from what most people think. Evil is interactive and sometimes funny. I have also learned that although the final dastardly step in any dance of evil certainly isn't your fault, you probably have dragged evil into your life. A realization of this fact isn't victim

blaming; it's situational awareness or what Hemingway once called your bullshit detector. In this essay, I'm going to explore both the nature of the molester and the nature of the high school that allowed him to flourish for so long. My responses to the second problem are not the standard refrain: that the Catholic Church turned a blind eye to the abuse. While, as the Grand Jury report makes painfully clear, that state of affairs was certainly true, four other inter-related factors were far more important: first, the almost institutional-level production of both codependence and narcissism; second, the version of Catholicism that was taught at my school and countless others like it; third, the school's hopeless enmeshment in Western Pennsylvania football culture; and, fourth, the rise, in the 1980s, of what British sociologist Frank Ferudi has called therapy culture. This last development helped to produce both the predator and the boys who seemed unable to kick him away. By focusing on these four factors, I want to bring a fresh and fuller approach to understanding how a culture of molestation occurred, not only at my school, but probably at similar schools across the country. In doing so, I'm going to attack some of the seeming truisms of the last thirty years: first, that high-school football cultures are healthy; second, that encouraging male emotional vulnerability is a good idea; and third, that the rise of therapy culture across the United States has been an unparalleled success.

Father Michael Barletta—or Barts, as we called him—was in his forties in the early and mid 1980s. He taught me both Junior and Senior theology. Dashing, Barts was called one of "the more notorious of the Erie priests" by Florida attorney Elana Goodman in a personal email to me when I was conducting research, and he grew up south of Erie in an upper-middle class family. He talked about his father being a lawyer, one who graduated from law school where I earned my undergraduate degree, the University of Pennsylvania, and letting Barts drive his Cadillac in high school. Barts told us that he had

started college at Georgetown and then bailed, returned to Erie, and finished at Gannon University. At Gannon, Barts was the fraternity brother of the father of one of my classmates. My friend relates that his dad was "completely shocked" by Barts' conduct, which, as the Grand Jury Report relates, included "acts of oral sex, naked massages, mutual fondling, and digital penetration."

Something always seemed weird to me about Barts' version of his early life. Very few people leave Georgetown willingly. One story that circulated among the boys was that Barts became a priest after being jilted by a girlfriend. I suspect that the real tale was that he had realized he was gay in the nineteen sixties and saw the priesthood as a kind of refuge and maybe a hunting ground.

Barts' case was far from unique. In *Bad Religion*, *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat argues that a priest like Barts, who was ordained in 1966, was produced by two contradictory forces in the 1960s Church: accommodation to change and resistance to it. As Douthat says, the accommodationists blamed the repression of celibacy for Barts' behavior. The resisters said that Barts and others like him were produced by the chaos of the sexual revolution and a version of don't ask/don't tell in the clerical selection process. These issues were combined with "an anything goes climate of seminary life in the wake of Vatican II, [and] the theological confusion that had produced justifications for any kind of 'life-style choice.'" According to the Grand Jury Report, Bart's behavior conformed pretty closely to the Stonewall-era bathhouse culture of San Francisco: trips to hotels in California and Toronto, naked massages, and mutual masturbation.

Although I didn't know the term in those days, Barts seems to fit the profile of those with Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Let me be clear about this; today, this term is thrown around pretty loosely. In the way in which I'm using it, Barts saw the boys as simply tools for gratification.

Ironically, Barts was also trained as a counselor, and, as the Grand Jury Report reveals, he used both his skill as a hypnotist and his knowledge of defense mechanisms to disarm some of the boys.

While I had no idea Barts was an actual predator, details suggested that something was off. Barts always wore cologne. To this day, I remember the smell, and he wore a weird set of clothes, a set symbolically suggesting that Barts was more than met the eye. Under his priest's shirt, which was kind of an ascot, he usually had a bright Izod knit sports shirt on. Back when teachers smoked in the cafeteria and in the teacher's lounges, he smoked a great deal and served as the cool priest for many boys.

Barts' nicotine habit and his response to it are to me today very darkly funny, almost in the same way that Ryan Reynolds' 2020 satanic Match.com video ad causes laughter by combining the quotidian with the demonic. In theology class one day, Barts told us all very seriously that he was trying to quit smoking "because smoking is a sin." A kind of moral rearranging of deckchairs on the *Titanic*, Barts' Great American Smokeout was not accompanied by a giving up of teenaged boys. Rather, in the psychological terms that Barts himself taught us, he engaged in displacement: he couldn't do anything about the boys, so he gave up smoking instead.

In group guidance during theology, Barts would have us write moral questions down on slips of paper and put them in a hat. Then he would draw out questions and answer them. He would love to entertain questions about masturbation. He said to us, "If you can't help yourself, sometimes it's better to just do it." We would all laugh. Now, of course, I wonder: who was he talking about?

I had two real warnings about Barts' true nature, neither of which I fully understood but both of which made me not particularly like him. The first was that he trashed

colleagues he didn't like, especially the intellectually gifted ones. He denounced my AP English teacher as a feminist. While she had attended Bryn Mawr, Betsy Morgan was also deeply Christian and no proto Jessica Valenti. Barts also wrote off Monsignor Latimer, a brilliant priest in his seventies who had at least one PhD and maybe two. Barts' opinion of him: "He just likes letters after his name." Interestingly, Barts was far more charismatic than either of these two outstanding and brilliant teachers. Indeed, he came closer than either of them to being like Robin Williams' character Mr. Keating, in *Dead Poets' Society*. That movie's creator, Tom Schulman, attended the Nashville boys' school Montgomery Bell Academy. I had met and competed against students from MBA at debate tournaments. While I liked *Dead Poets' Society*, I think Schulman made the mistake in the movie of conflating charisma with brilliance. They are not the same. Schulman should have known better.

The other warning was Barts' propensity to come to the school's pool and watch us as we swam during Phys Ed class. This behavior dovetails pretty well with the Grand Jury Report, which said that Barts was "known to take pictures inside the boys' locker room of the kids' crotch area and… maintains a book of 'crotch shots' in his residence." Until I read the Grand Jury report, I hadn't heard the term 'crotch shots' in over thirty years, while I was in school. Older students talked occasionally about a priest who had such photographs. I didn't realize that my friends were talking about Barts. Very late in my time at Prep, I had occasion to talk to Barts at the rectory of the church at which he was an assistant. When I entered his room, he was watching Greg Louganis swim on television. Barts asked me if it would be okay if he kept the television on with the volume turned down while we talked. Nothing untoward happened, but I couldn't help but think the situation odd.

While Barts did teach theology, his real passion was moderating the Teenage Action Club, an organization that he

founded and that figures prominently in the Grand Jury Report. TAC was a cross between a service-learning organization and a social club that Holden Caulfield would have felt at home in. It was very upper middle class: teenagers in docksiders and Izods, trips to the beach, mixers. The Grand Jury Report did make one inaccurate statement about TAC: “This club was made up of students who were active in the community, church, athletics, and academics.” For the most part, the best students, those in the top five percent of each class, weren’t in TAC. Barts picked pets based on bodies, not brains.

TAC members visited nursing homes and did other volunteer work. In addition, the club—which was accurately referenced in the Grand Jury Report as “Barletta’s pretty people”— had events like bon fires. Club membership was open to both the Prep boys and girls from Villa Maria and St. Benedict’s, our sister schools. Only boys, however, could hold leadership positions. Barts’ rationale for this policy proves darkly humorous in retrospect. He had said once in theology that “I need to meet with the club officers in private and it wouldn’t be safe for me to be alone with the girls. I might get accused of sexual harassment.” The girls didn’t have to worry.

Barts would host TAC weekend sleepovers for the boys. Clearly, TAC served to groom victims. I was just too geeky for TAC. My time was spent studying, watching *Star Trek*, listening to Weird Al Yankovic, marching in the band, and going on debate trips. I was striving to get into an Ivy, and the kind of affirmation I needed Barts couldn’t offer. I wasn’t cool or ripped, so I never competed for Barts’ attention as the more popular kids did, and, thus, I faced no danger. With a father who was a public-school principal and a mother who was an elementary school teacher, I certainly wasn’t poor, but I never ran in the social or economic circles that the TAC kids did.

Holden Caulfield I was not.

While one may think that I'm angry at the school or God for allowing a pederast to hold court for decades, I'm not particularly upset. Of course, that's easy for me to say since I was never approached. However, there exist predators in any population, and, contrary to millennial theory, there exist no truly safe spaces. To learn that fact early and unscathed is a gift.

In addition, from my teenaged perspective, not only was Barts weird, so were the boys he went after. The types of boys who were molested seemed to me to have, like their abuser, a fair amount of somatic narcissism: Barts' pretty people. And many of them could be bullies and pretty vicious. Indeed, I remember having to physically grab one of the TAC kids—who was also a jock— by the throat after being slammed into my locker. While my school wasn't much like Pencey Prep, it did actually resemble the fictional military academy in Pat Conroy's *Lords of Discipline*, which I read while I was still in high school. I learned to physically defend myself from other boys. While the adult version of me recognizes that nobody deserves to be sexually harassed or molested, part of me, the deep, deep part of me, thinks: what you sow, you reap.

One victim said in a story in the *Erie Times News*: "We were good-looking kids, athletic kids, growing up." I find it odd that the first thing he said about himself was how good looking he was. How many mature males say that? The victim also said, "This guy preyed on guys who had pretty strong personalities, who ultimately would be embarrassed if anything like this came out." There's a weird logic here: the most damaging point about being sexually assaulted by a priest was that one wouldn't be cool any longer? You don't worry about your image; you get help. As an adult at a remove of over thirty years, I think to myself that maybe the personalities were strong, but I'm not entirely sure the characters were; the TAC kids in my class seemed to thrive on being popular: form over substance; they fit perfectly with a shape-shifting

priest.

Now, of course, the school and the Church bear legal and moral responsibility for Barts' conduct, as does Barts himself. The Grand Jury report clearly reveals that administrators either knew or had deep suspicions about what was going on.

But in this essay I am not so interested about legal responsibility. While that of course is important, more crucial, I think, is why these boys tragically failed to see what Barts was or at least didn't get some really uncomfortable vibes in the same way I did. Barts, it would seem, is directly responsible for the creation of some very real pain and suffering. What he is accused of doing was wrong and illegal and a complete betrayal of the priesthood and the trust the boys had in him. Those points are unquestionable.

But in any discussion of evil, I believe that you have to think about how you draw evil into your life or at least how you co-create the circumstances of disaster. Misreading people and situations can have terrible consequences. I'm far from victim blaming here. Rather, I understand from my own life that you are not responsible when someone else does something illegal or disgusting to you. But, from a risk-mitigation standpoint, you have to take responsibility as a co-creator of the circumstances that allowed the evil to take place. This acceptance of responsibility turns one from a passive victim into an empowered individual with agency.

For example, in my late twenties, I had a knife held to my back in the subway tunnels in Philadelphia. I am not responsible legally for what happened. My assailant was. Yet, in retrospect, I can see that I created some of the circumstances that led to that moment. I could have avoided the hallway in which about sixty homeless people were sleeping against the walls. I thought they were benign. I was wrong, and I carelessly walked right down a gauntlet. I brought myself to the place in which my assailant almost killed me.

Closer to the case of Barts, also in my late twenties, during my first year of college teaching, I accepted a ride home from a flamboyant gay department chair. Indeed, he was so flamboyant that he offered to have his lover give me a blowjob. Straight and not particularly wanting to mix business with pleasure, I declined the offer. I am not responsible for his behavior. But I was responsible for being in that car with him. He had a reputation for being a "character." And I noticed that he had eyed me a couple of times when we talked in my office. I had dropped my teenaged chubbiness and wore a leather jacket and motorcycle boots in those days. Because he was in a position to offer me more work, I wanted to be on good terms with him, and I never suspected he would step across a boundary so completely. That was a lack of good judgement on my part. My point is that we do partially create the circumstances in which bad things happen. Knowing this fact is about prevention.

Now, in the case of Barts, one can argue—correctly—that his victims were minors. However, these were older minors, sixteen or seventeen. Some of them might have even been legal adults. Under current Pennsylvania law, none of that matters legally since Barts was a teacher. However, my point isn't that these boys were somehow consenting to sexual activity with Barts. I very much doubt they were. There's another issue at stake here, one that we ignore. Most discussions about the Catholic sexual abuse scandal assume three things: Male on female abuse, adult and young child, and an obsession with power, not sex. None of these factors held here. This was male on male; it was adult and almost adult, and while manipulation and power imbalance were certainly in play here, this was about sex. Barts was good looking. He could have scored with both women and men. The boys were good looking as well. This was the 80s: everybody was clean shaven; athletic; dressed in Izods, khakis, and docksiders; and worried about image. This was about sex, straight up, not, primarily, about power. Barts didn't go after pre-pubescent children. My guess is

that he wanted hard, athletic bodies and beautiful male faces. And he got them, in spades. Many of the TAC boys were applying to college, working part-time jobs, carrying heavy course loads, and even applying to military-officer training programs. Although the Grand Jury Report talks about Barts molesting "children," his victims were far from being children, and these were physically strong boys with powerful parents. TAC boys, some of whom ended up in the NFL, could have decked Barts. But no one ever did. One word from any major-donor parent would have ended this debacle, but that word never came. The reason that all this matters is that, unlike is the case with adult-very young child molestation, these boys had resources to use to protect themselves. Somehow, though, these resources weren't employed. Understanding why they weren't can help others in the future to protect themselves. In addition, because my school is Catholic, people never even talked about the possibility of males being objects of sexual desire for other males. This reluctance to talk about homosexuality, not as a sin, but as a reality that straight males could face, probably left the boys vulnerable to somebody like Barts: the queer eye for the straight guy.

So, what happened here? Some would argue that Barts, because he was a teacher and a priest, simply abused his position of authority, and the church and the school turned a blind eye to his activities. Those statements are true. He certainly did, and they certainly did. But I suspect that something else, something much darker than mere abuse of authority was occurring: seduction. Because Barts was trained as counselor, my guess is that he was able to tell which of us were also narcissistic. Once he identified a young narcissist—and as the *Erie Times News* interviews indicate, many of my classmates who were stars on sports teams certainly filled that bill—Barts probably provided a steady stream of narcissistic feed: you're great. You're wonderful. You're a good looking guy. To paraphrase H.L. Mencken, give the people what they want, good

and hard. Narcissistic people are at risk of being crime victims because they can't see the evil coming. These people don't seem to understand that when someone really starts flattering you, they're doing so for a reason. They want something in return.

Clearly, these boys' bullshit detectors weren't functioning correctly. This state of affairs wasn't universal in the school. Many friends and I would talk openly about priests that we thought were probably pedophiles. Interestingly, another priest—who was also credibly accused—Father Slocum, we all called "Father Strokum." We would actually laugh about him. More important, we didn't spend time alone with him. Another priest, who was not a pedophile, often seemed two-faced. He would say one thing and do another. His last name was, of all things, "Bible." We often said, "Did you see the Fathers Bible?" You never knew who you were talking to. My point here is that my friends and I, while we did what we were told in class and in school, actually had a pretty healthy underlying disrespect for authority, even that of priests. I'm not sure the TAC boys had this quality. And that lack of disrespect could have been part of the problem here.

The *Erie Times News* reporter Pat Howard, who initially broke the story about Barts in 2003, is also a Prep alumnus. Howard writes of Barts: "I clearly remember him sitting in the desk next to me in the back of the room one day as students one by one stood up to speak as part of some exercise. In a low voice he briefly disparaged one of my classmates to me as he spoke, which seemed odd coming from an authority figure even then." There are two problems with this statement. First, Howard seems naïve. When I worked in publishing, I sat in in a room in which a vice president verbally slaughtered my boss to me. This kind of stuff happens all the time. Second, maybe it's because I'm the child of a teacher and a principal and had heard my father talk about teachers screwing around that I only partially saw any teacher as an authority figure. Figures

of power, yes. Authority, no. Those are two different things. Some of my teachers I liked and respected. But I liked them precisely because they had command of their subjects. As Hannah Arendt has pretty convincingly argued in her mid-20th century essay "The Crisis in Education," the only real authority a teacher possesses is disciplinary mastery. All the rest is the state- and institution- backed power of a martinet. It was this disciplinary mastery that I've always based my respect for teachers on. Although Barts had grading power over me, and I was wary of that power, he was a mediocre teacher and not very well read. In senior year theology, we were supposed to do comparative religion projects. I'll never forget that I mentioned Taoism to Barts, and he had no idea of what it was. Thus, unlike Howard, I never really saw Barts as much of an authority figure, much less a guru.

And this issue of having too much respect for authority might have been one of the failures of the school. Let me be clear here: I enjoyed my high-school experience. I made close friends and had opportunities to participate in activities that were important to me. And the experience certainly helped me. It got me out of Erie and opened the world to me. Through the years, I've appreciated just how far the leap from Lake Erie to the Ivy League was. Very few people from my lower-middle class background make that jump. And Cathedral Prep served as a springboard for me. The education was good. However, there was something about the ethos of the school that might have created the circumstances that didn't allow some boys to develop the inner hardness that would have allowed them to tell Barts to fuck off.

If I had been approached, I would have immediately gone to my parents. People have asked me whether my parents would have believed me because Barts was a priest. Oh, absolutely. My dad, who was a Protestant and a principal who had to deal with teacher misconduct, had found unwanted hands making their way to his knee under bar tables when he was in the Army right

after World War II. Interestingly because he was a Greatest Generation dad and not a Baby Boomer, he seemed harder and perhaps more aware of evil in the world than the Boomers did. He would have understood. Something seemed off with everybody involved in this fiasco, though, involving as it probably did the sons of Catholic Erie's social elite.

I think one of the circumstances that created the culture that allowed Barts to thrive at my school involved the version of Catholicism dominant in America in the last forty-five years or so. The American Catholicism that I grew up with was enmeshed hopelessly in football culture, especially in Western Pennsylvania. One of my father's friends had been a principal for a while in Beaver Falls, about one-hundred miles south of Erie. One of the students in his high school was none other than Joe Namath, a Catholic. In study hall, I sat behind Mark Stepnoski, a year ahead of me, who later went on to help the Dallas Cowboys win Super Bowl XXVIII. I'm pretty sure Mark was in TAC. Also probably in TAC was one of Mark's classmates, Charlie Bauman, whose little brother Gary I had gone to two years of Catholic grade school with, and who was one of my classmates. Charlie, whose parents owned a successful carpet business on the east side of Erie, became a place kicker for, first, the Miami Dolphins, and, later, the New England Patriots. Speaking of the Miami Dolphins, my school used to debate students from Pittsburgh Central Catholic. I had been on that campus several times. One of PCC's most famous alumni is Dan Marino, who was inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame back in 2003. While I was in school, I half expected the ghost of Knute Rockne to show up. Indeed, several of the teachers who were also coaches had attended Notre Dame itself. At all-school rallies, a thousand boys would shout, "Mary, Queen of Prep, Pray for us!" This kind of Catholicism emphasized being a team player, being popular, winning, and following the coach's instructions. Echoes of this kind of Catholicism can be seen today in the work of Matthew Kelly, whose books are peddled in failing Catholic parishes across the country. To my

mind, Kelly, who was an Australian jock in high school, and who is now a partner in an American PR firm that does work for Fortune 500 companies, views Catholicism as a kind of spiritual self -help allowing one to be the best one can be. One becomes a good Catholic by attending church and being a good family person and having a good career. This version of Catholicism is about meeting challenges, about saying yes.

There's another, much older version of Catholicism, one that we weren't really exposed to in the 1980s. This Catholicism is the much more demanding, oppositional, and uncomfortable version of the religion. It's about saying no and being willing to pay the price for doing so. This is the Catholicism of the late Bishop Oscar Romero, who preached against oppression in El Salvador and got shot to death at mass in 1980 for his trouble. Another exemplar is Saint Thomas Moore, who gave us the first version of utopia and who was executed for saying no to an English king. Saint Francis of Assisi said no to wealth and power and lived in voluntary poverty. Perhaps one of the most amazing examples of a Catholic saying no occurred in the last century. Colonel Klaus von Staufenburg, who was a devout Catholic as well as a Prussian officer, said no to Adolph Hitler and was shot for trying to assassinate the Fuhrer. The Trappist monk Thomas Merton, who practically single-handedly revitalized mid-20th century Catholicism through the publication of his spiritual autobiography *Seven Story Mountain*, said no to US dominant culture. He also, I should add, fought pitched battles with his own Catholic hierarchy, who occasionally wanted to silence him. Merton's friend, the Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan, said no to the Vietnam War and landed himself in Federal prison. Today's pope, Francis, an Argentine who grew up in the crushing poverty of Buenos Aires, has, in his encyclicals, said no to corporations who want to pollute the planet.

In general, our school didn't concern itself with creating men who said no, except maybe for premarital sex and abortion. The

school constructed men who said yes, who played on the team, who, in the age of Ronald Reagan at least, won one for the Gipper. Indeed, besides the sports figures that I've mentioned, our school created hosts of lawyers, doctors, engineers, and business people. The school also created not a few a politicians—like Lou Tulio, the former mayor of Erie. The school also produced many, many veterans and not a few war heroes. One of my classmates served as a Marine lieutenant colonel conducting black ops in Afghanistan and Iraq. Perhaps one of the most influential alumni of the school is Tom Ridge, who, after completing Prep, won a scholarship to Harvard, fought in Vietnam, went to law school, served in Congress, became a Pennsylvania governor, and served as the first Secretary of Homeland Security under the Bush Administration. Certainly the consummate team player, Ridge helped to shape domestic and foreign policy for the first twenty years of the twenty-first century.

By most measures the school has been incredibly successful in producing men who say yes, who step up, who play on the team, who win one for the Gipper. But it's precisely this willingness to say yes, to obey authority, to take one for the team that has a dark side, one that created some of the circumstances and the lack of character that allowed Barts to survive and thrive for so long. A combination of a willingness to work hard and never say no, especially to power holders, can, if not accompanied by a development of boundaries, lead to codependence and people pleasing. I don't think the school was very good at helping boys to develop boundaries that could be defended. It's this lack of boundaries more than any other factor, I think, that allowed this fiasco to go on for decades. One can point to the unwillingness of the church and the school to police Barts. And one should do such pointing. However, the school's bigger failure was in encouraging the development of boys who couldn't say no, physically if necessary.

Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, while the school has produced sports heroes, war heroes, and members of the ruling class, it has produced only one person in recent times who seems to have had the fortitude to say no on a massive scale. In 1999, the rather geeky looking accountant Harry Markopolos, who graduated from Cathedral Prep during the Polyester Decade in 1974, began an investigation that would lead to the stopping of the largest financial Ponzi scheme in American history and the arrest of a charlatan and fraudster of epic proportions: Bernie Madoff. Markopolos, risking his own career, barked at the door of the Securities and Exchange Commission for years before anybody would listen to him. He had been right all along. The returns Madoff was producing were mathematically impossible, and he had never placed any trades with his clients' money. He simply had used new clients' funds to pay "dividends" to his already existing client base. Somewhere along the line, Markopolos had developed the intelligence, the strength, and the courage to keep saying no even when everybody else had said yes. If my school had produced more people like Markopolos—people who care more about what's right and less about popularity—and fewer people like the TAC kids, Barts would not have lasted an hour.

Some might argue that the boys Barts went after were teenagers and therefore didn't have much power to say no. There is truth in this argument; the whole structure of school mitigates against real teenaged rebellion; in a Catholic school authority figures and powerholders are tacitly aligned with God Himself. Even in the wider culture, contemporary constructs of childhood—reaching far past the age of thirteen or fourteen, when physical adulthood has been achieved—also work to disempower students and keep them from interrogating adults, even those deserving of interrogation. By questioning, I'm not talking about the usual stuff: smoking or dress codes. What I mean is a teenage discovery of a real threat: you're trying to hurt me or use me in some way, or

your wielding of power is so egregious that my personhood and humanity demand that I must take action against you, consequences be damned.

There did exist—during my time at my school—a couple of examples of students taking action against adult powerholders. The first example involved a transfer student named Bob. In my class, Bob arrived at the school during junior year. Quite gifted in mathematics, Bob was placed in AP calculus, a course usually reserved for seniors. The course was taught by one of the biggest horror shows at the school—Miss Maxwell. Her reputation for being "tough" wasn't confined to academics. A former nun who dropped out of the convent in the sixties, Miss Maxwell seemed to me to be one of those early second wave feminists who saw masculinity basically as brutality and who, therefore, were convinced that the way to succeed in a man's world was to be as brutal as any male could be. Miss Maxwell succeeded in this endeavor. She had a reputation for pulling hair and ears during class. She would sometimes hit boys on the back of the head. What she thought she was accomplishing I'm not entirely sure, but she met her match when Bob arrived in her classroom. Apparently not able to read people very well, she either pulled Bob's ear or hit him on the back of the head. He stood up and decked her. Once she was down on the ground, Bob engaged in overkill and kicked her. It took three seniors to pull him away from her. The school's reaction was predictable. Bob hit a woman. He was unstable. Bob was, of course, expelled immediately. Interestingly, I don't believe he was prosecuted for assault. Such a prosecution—even in juvenile court—would have opened the school to having to answer the question of why Miss Maxwell was hitting people in the first place. Despite having had to face consequences, Bob accomplished a small miracle: Miss Maxwell never touched another student. I wish there had been a Bob in Barts' life.

Closer to home, during my senior year, the school nominated

one teacher, Mr. Hansen, as the discipline director. In those days, I had laughed because I had seen Monty Python's *Yellowbeard*. There was a scene in the movie in which James Mason, playing an eighteenth-century ship captain, introduced his officers to the crew. The dialogue had gone something like the following: "This is Mr. Smith, in charge of discipline. This is Mr. Jones, in charge of discipline. This is Mr. Schmidt, in charge of discipline." When one of the sailors laughs, Mason says, "Nail that man's foot to the deck." I had had four years of often mindless discipline. There had been informal hazing. The giving of wedgies was almost an art form. Almost unbelievably, because I was in a marching band that was actually taught marching by a real-life Vietnam-era Paris Island drill instructor, I had even been subjected to military-style discipline. By senior year, I was ready to get out of the post-industrial nightmare of Erie and start a real life. When Hansen became the discipline director, I had shuddered. I didn't know him well, but he had, to my mind, all earmarks of a small-town bully. A graduate of the school, he had gone to Notre Dame on a sports scholarship. As was the case for many teachers, he was, first and foremost, a coach, and he taught lower-level English courses. When he became discipline director, he patrolled the hallways, grabbed boys, and shook them.

During my senior year, I was the editor of our school's literary magazine, *Paragraphs Lost*. I wrote, and we published, a mock epic about the school in which I made Hansen the chief villain. I basically humiliated him in front of a thousand students, all the faculty, and the administration. He was livid. In the words of George Orwell recounting his own experience at a prep school, I received the "dread summons" to the headmaster's office. Monsignor Haggerty had a copy of the magazine sitting on the desk, open to my story. I had taken the measure of putting the monsignor in the story as the hero. We sat silently for a few minutes. I smiled and said, "I made you the good guy." A slight smile played across the

Monsignor's face, and he said, "Mr. Texter, I think that we all need to learn to laugh at ourselves a bit." I responded: "That's exactly what I was thinking, Monsignor." And that was it. No demerits, no detention. Nothing. One of my regrets as an adult is that I didn't know about Barts. If I had, I would have gone after him pretty mercilessly. That action might have done some good.

So, there were ways of directly dealing with faculty members who were completely out of control as Hansen, Maxwell, and Barts were. What's interesting, though, is that both Bob and I were pretty much outliers at school, and we both had parents who were in education. His father was a faculty member at a local university, and my father was a principal. Perhaps having parents in the biz made us more skeptical and less trusting of our teachers and maybe of authority and power in general. And while I don't know about Bob's homelife, Catholicism had less of an impact on me than it probably did on most of the boys at my school. While I had been baptized and confirmed, I had only one Catholic parent, my mother. My parents had married before Vatican II, and my father agreed that any offspring would be raised Catholic. He had honored that agreement. But he also didn't put up with bullshit. One Sunday morning, he was picking me up from CCD, and he was standing outside the classroom at St. Anne's. He overheard my CCD teacher, a nun, saying that Protestants would go to Hell. After the class ended, he told me to wait outside the classroom, and he walked in to see Sister Leocadia. He said, "Sister, some of the kids have a Protestant parent. Knock off the stuff about Protestants going to Hell." So, while I was taught to be polite and basically do what I was told in school, my father did teach me that there exist limits to one's politeness and acquiescence and that one should say something if authority became capricious. I'm not sure that most of the boys at the school had this kind of parental guidance, and they certainly didn't have my father's fundamental skepticism about authority.

Another problem here, one that wasn't really discussed by the John Jay Report or the Grand Jury report, is that Barts wasn't just a priest; he was a psychologist as well, or at least he was trained in counseling psychology. He was ordained in the 1960s, when pop psychology was really getting rolling. By the 1980s, something was happening to the culture, something not very salutary.

One could see a manifestation of the change in the television shows of the early 1980s. As a child, I was a fan of police procedurals: the *Rockford Files*, *Barnaby Jones*, *Hawaii Five O*. The men on these shows were, more or less, self-contained. The logic of the shows mirrored the logic of the heroes. There were no continuing story lines. A problem arrived on the stage; the hero solved it and moved on to the next conundrum.

All this changed in 1980, two years before I enrolled at Cathedral Prep. I remember sitting in my parents' living room watching television one late summer evening. The door of a police-station garage rolled back, and squad cars rolled out. Yet, the piano music that accompanied the cars' entry into the snowy winter streets of a never-named city wasn't hard-driving; rather, it was laconic, exploratory, tentative, not the music of a show like SWAT, which promised a shoot-out in every episode. *Hill Street Blues* had arrived on the cultural scene.

The main characters of the show were not typical cops. Captain Furillo, the ranking precinct officer, was a divorced father with a flaky ex-wife. His current main squeeze was Liz Davenport, a very beautiful public defender. The desk sergeant often talked about his own middle-aged virility during roll calls. One of the detectives, JD, was an alcoholic. Storylines continued from one episode to the next as the cops battled their own personal lives as well as evil on the street. These characters had absolutely no boundaries at all.

When it started, *Hill Street Blue*s seemed an improvement on the typical cop show. These police officers were human, if by human one means totally obsessed with their extremely dysfunctional personal lives. This show, unlike all the ones that proceeded it, emphasized male vulnerability. Indeed, culturally, *Hill Street Blues* helped to suggest that all males were vulnerable, psychologically and emotionally. The show helped to undercut notions of stoicism and self-reliance and boundaries. It's exactly these qualities that help people fend off predators.

By the mid-1980s, when Barts' pedophilia was in full blossom, this notion of vulnerability had moved to the mainstream of pop psychology. The two main psychological sales people of the 1980s were John Bradshaw and Leo Buscaglia. In those days, I watched *Dr. Who* on our local PBS channel, WQLN. Occasionally, the Doctor and the Dahleks were exterminated for a Bradshaw or Buscaglia special.

According to Bradshaw, who, like Barts, seemed to be a Romantic on the order of Rousseau in terms of self-serving glorification of the innocence of the young, we all had inner children that had been repressed. The key to life success was to undo the repression of society and nurture that inner child. As the *Washington Post* writes, "Thousands turned out for motivational workshops in which he coached participants through mental exercises. Often holding a stuffed animal, and with a soundtrack of new-age music, they returned to their childhood to confront their wounded younger selves." Bradshaw defined the "inner child" as the "part of you that got repressed." The Grand Jury report reveals that Barts, as he was molesting the boys, would try to help them overcome their resistance, He would say, "That's normal." He both molested and coached. It was through showing Barts their vulnerability that these boys became victims. While Bradshaw was helping everyone to be vulnerable, Leo Buscaglia preached forgiveness, especially forgiveness of oneself for mistakes. Interestingly,

many of Barts' victims noted that his version of Catholicism emphasized forgiveness, especially forgiveness of the self. In one of his specials, Buscaglia discussed a time in which he got off on the wrong floor of a building on the way to teach a class: "It's all right Leo. You got off at the wrong floor and will be late, but you are still a beautiful person. I love you, Leo, you adorable guy. It's cute how you keep making these funny mistakes." I'm guessing it was a version of this ability to engage in self-forgiveness that allowed Barts to continue to molest teenagers and simultaneously teach and moderate a social organization for those same teenagers. Knowing him as I did, I can see Barts saying, "It's ok, Mike, you adorable guy. It's cute how you keep making these funny mistakes. You are still a beautiful person." It seems clear to me that Barts would get the boys to be vulnerable with him, excuse himself for what he was doing, and molest away for two decades.

It's no mistake, I think, that some of the most horrifying characters in literature and film of the last seventy-five years have been therapists. One thinks of Major Sanderson in *Catch-22*, Dr. Haber in *Lathe of Heaven*, and, of course, Hannibal Lector, in *Silence of the Lambs*. All of these mental health professionals were quite cracked and exploited their patients. In *Therapy Culture* British sociologist Frank Ferudi writes that one of therapy's downsides is that modern psychology really isn't about constructing a resilient self. Such a self would not be good for business. Rather, psychology is more interested in creating a vulnerable self, one constantly in need of professional assistance and, therefore, one generating billable hours. More hours, more money, more grants. Or, in the case of Barts, more sex with underage boys. I find it interesting beyond words that in junior year theology, Barts taught us all about psychological defense mechanisms. And the Grand Jury Report reveals that when the boys did balk, he would explain their discomfort to them in terms of those defense mechanisms. Presumably, he would

counsel the boys about how to feel better about what he was doing to them.

While Barts, of course, was awful, I actually learned from him. As the Dali Lama says, “The enemy is a very good teacher.” First, I learned teachers should never, ever be personal gurus. The best teachers I’ve had were professionally friendly with me, but no more. Second, I learned to honor my instincts. Third, Barts taught me something about evil’s nature. The late poet Joseph Brodsky said that awful people rarely say, “Hi, I’m evil.” Usually, evil prevails because it offers the victim something he or she wants. Evil doesn’t hit you over the head, not at first; it courts you. Then it’s too late; you’re caught. You have to know your own desires and recognize when somebody seems to be catering to them. The question you have to ask is what will be wanted in return.

Barts wanted a lot.

To return to where I began, while I am still not a fan of Holden Caulfield, he was right: there are phonies in the world.

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Douglas W. Texter is currently a faculty member at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, KS. His scholarship has appeared in venues such as *Utopian Studies*, *Journal in the Fantastic in the Arts*, *Extrapolation*, and *Foundation*. His essays, reviews, and interviews have appeared in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *A Voice for Men*, *Tangent Online*, and the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.