

"I gotta walk that lonesome valley,
I gotta walk it by myself.
There aint nobody here can walk it for me,
I gotta walk it by myself."

"The Reverend Mr. Black" by [Billy Edd Wheeler](#), [Mike Stoller](#), and [Jerry Leiber](#)

If there was a song of the early 60's that described my journey to healing from clergy abuse as a child, The Kingston Trio's refrain of "The Reverend Mr. Black" was an apt description. I was abused by a priest in the late 50's. Oh, the signs were all there, but in those days no one knew what was to come for the victims in the way of suffering, pain, anger, shame and all the other horrible feelings of anguish and mistrust. For those who were abused by clergy, there was the added layer of trust in God, the Church, priests, and yes, even loved ones that was lost in an instant and maybe for a lifetime.

As a youngster in my generation, we were taught to be self-reliant. We were told real men never cry. Be strong "suck it up", there is nothing you can't do alone. That was the mantra I lived by for so many years, I can take care of this, I can heal myself. What I achieved was some 35 years of pushing the effects of what happened deeper and deeper within my very being. It was like a cancer eating away, sucking all my energy for living, loving, enjoying life, and growing in faith, love, and hope.

I walked that journey by myself, letting it destroy me and my marriage for 21 years. It was when I found the courage to tell my wife what happened to me so long ago that my journey to healing began to unfold. I remember her reaction -- it was one love, care, concern, and an instant desire to walk "That Lonesome Valley" with me no matter where it might take us. I can only imagine the hurt and confusion that swelled up in her as she wondered why I did not trust her enough to confide this most intimate secret to her.

We talked and cried a great deal, but I swore her to secrecy. I was not ready to deal with the shame, anger, and sense of betrayal that had been swelling up all those years. It was after a particularly bad evening, that she convinced me to go talk to a priest about this. I talked to two, and they tried their best to help. At their suggestion, I ended up in therapy. At that time, therapy included pills and talk of everything but the abuse. I soon gave up on the therapy and pills, still feeling very much alone.

After drifting in an endless fog, I met a Franciscan nun who helped me face the demons and do something about it. My wife and I spent a good deal of time with her. She guided me as I reported the priest to the Diocese where he was working and to the Diocese where he was incardinated and which was the one where the abuse occurred. If that was not enough, I was encouraged, all the while protesting, to seek out the Victim Assistance coordinator in the Diocese of Arlington. I did not know what to expect, but I reached out reluctantly. What my wife and I found was a welcoming smile, a warm welcome and a true desire to help.

In 2004 when I first met Pat Mudd, there were no programs in place just a desire to somehow make the valley less lonesome. She kept suggesting that we meet with the Bishop. I protested because he had nothing to do with my abuse and its aftermath, but she continued to encourage the visit. I relented and met with Bishop Loverde and found a man of immense courage and love who was ready to be willing partner with us as we walked our individual journey to spiritual wellbeing.

Since that meeting with the Bishop, a lot has happened. I have learned that there is hope for healing, that we are able to be loved and return that love to others, that it is easier to walk through "That Lonesome Valley" with my head held high knowing that the love of our God, my church, and my wife are right there with me.

What makes this all the more remarkable is as a child and into adulthood, I thought I was the only one, that I alone had to walk this journey. That changed when I met other victims through the Diocesan sponsored support group sessions, retreats, prayer services for healing, and the Bishop telling all of us over and over again "This is not your fault, you are loved by God and you will always be His child". I have been given a voice to speak of my struggles, my feelings or lack of feelings, my successes and failures, my anger, and yes, my ability to forgive and move to a better more healthy and joyful state in my remaining years.

I never want to walk "That Lonesome Valley" again; and so I use my voice to help others find the courage to walk out of "That Lonesome Valley" and experience the sweetness of healing through the love of God, neighbor, and self.

Help is truly abundant in Arlington. We only have to reach for the outstretched hand.