

Michael Mack confronts abuser in 'Faith'

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It took Michael Mack decades to reconcile, but tonight the Cambridge playwright and poet will share the secret that has haunted him since childhood.

Mack's one-man show "Conversations with My Molester: A Journey of Faith," at Boston Playwrights' Theatre, chronicles his struggles as a victim of abuse at the hands of a priest.

"One of the reasons I am doing this is because I lived with this secret for decades," said Mack, 55. "The secret is like an illness. Address the problem of secrecy. Child sexual abuse is the last dark secret we have as a society."

The 90-minute monologue is a follow-up to his other autobiographical work, "Hearing Voices, Speaking in Tongues," about his mother's battle with mental illness.

Mack, a Washington, D.C.-area native, was 11 years old and living in North Carolina when the abuse took place. "One afternoon, in the spring of 1968, he (the priest) invited me into the rectory for a project, to make costumes," Mack said. "That changed everything."

Mack declined to name the clergyman, and he does not name him in the play. "Part of it is this one priest had a family. How long must the family live with that?" Mack said. "I spent 10 years deciding, 'Do I want to go that route?' No."

The timing of the play's debut is apt. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the break in the church sexual abuse scandal. The scandal helped Mack move forward in his healing process. In 2005, he ran a Google search on the name of his abuser.

"I learned not only was he still alive, but he was living in Worcester," Mack said.

And he was accused of abusing other children. "It felt like the hand of God," Mack said. "I had tangible proof."

Mack began imagining what confronting him would be like, and from that grew "Conversations with My Molester" and Mack's return to the church after years of absence.

"I think the church has gone a long way to fully reconcile its failings," Mack said. "That was one of the good things that came out of that scandal. Priests were almost like God. It's not true anymore."

"Conversations with My Molester: A Journey of Faith," Boston Playwrights' Theatre, 949 Commonwealth Ave. Through Jan. 22. Tickets: \$27; 617-353-5443, www.michaelmacklive.com