
Conversations with My Molester: A Journey of Faith

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Monday Jan 16, 2012



"What am I about to see?...should I be nervous?...will I need my Kleenex?" These were my thoughts as the lights dimmed for **"Conversations with My Molester: A Journey of Faith."**

Michael Mack's dramatization of his own experiences was first presented last year as a staged reading for the 2nd annual Family Violence and Trauma conference held at Foxwoods, but this presentation is the world premiere as far as theatrical venues go.

Mack is acclaimed (National Public Radio, Boston Sunday Globe) for a previous one-man dramatization that was about growing up with a schizophrenic mother ("Hearing Voices, Speaking in Tongues"), which is also a story of deliverance.

This second autobiographical story from Michael Mack is performed by him in a one-person show that relives his journey of faith, hypocrisy, self-discovery, healing, and, eventually, a process of forgiveness that has taken him some 40 years. Given that it is the 10-year anniversary of the Boston archdiocese cover-up scandal, the timing of this play is appropriate.

Michael always knew he wanted to be a priest; he had the same type of admiration and respect for his priest that he had for his father.

For an altar boy like Michael, having these close ties with his priest made him feel one step closer to God; however, that all changed when his family moved from Washington DC to Brevard North Carolina, where at the young age of 10, Michael joined a new Catholic Church.

It was not long before Michael felt right at home as an altar boy in this new church. 'Father Gordon' always made him feel very welcome; the church doors were always open.

One afternoon Michael stopped by the church for a visit. Father Gordon requested assistance with a few costumes in his apartment that conveniently sat above the church on the second floor. In the pretext of having the child try on a pair of pants, the priest fondled the boy then asked him to keep the occurrence a secret. It was a secret that changed Mack's life forever. "I felt chosen for something, but didn't know why or what for."

As an adult, Mack wants to talk with the priest who molested him. The conversation he wants to have with his molester is a very different conversation than one might expect, however.

This is not a story of hate, negativity, or revenge - it is actually the opposite; Michael Mack seeks answers such as:

Why was this done... did something like this happen to Father Gordon when he was young... and why do I get a tingling sensation when I talk about this?

As decades passed and Michael moved from Brevard, NC to Cambridge, MA, he began to wonder where Father Gordon was, if he was still alive, and if he was still a priest. Coincidentally, he heard about a book relating how the author talked to his molester - and there began Michael's search.

Google - the search engine of choice (and trigger for laughter through the play) - played a big part in Michael finding out the information he needed to confront Father Gordon in hopes of having a cordial conversation.

As coincidence would have it - or fate - Father Gordon was in the same state - and Michael would finally have his chance to ask all the questions he had been replaying in his head over and over. However, Michael would soon learn that having the conversation in his head is much easier than having it in person, "What if I learn something about myself that I don't want to know?"

With "Conversations with My Molester" you get to hear and feel the long term effects of molestation on what a child is going through from youth to adulthood - and, then, as the play progresses, the heavy burden of holding onto a secret and never getting the answers you want. As Michael poetically states, "A secret is a bio-chemical entity... like a drug." He goes on to talk about the effects of drugs in the human body and the similarities that carrying the burden of a secret can also have on the body.

What happened behind those doors decades earlier will never be forgotten and also shaped Michael's life and belief in faith going forward; however, through his search to find Father Gordon, Michael was able to find much more. He was able to find a way to forgive and eventually restore his faith in the church, 'Father', and God.

Effectively directed by Daniel Gidron, a regular at Nora Theater Company, "Conversations With My Molester" takes place on a stage with only a piano, a desk with a laptop, and a black board which become, through language and blocking only, four areas of Mack's life.

As the stage lights dim and the show ends - I recall my first thoughts...and I had answers. I saw a memory come to life before my eyes. So, yes, there were parts that made me nervous and that's okay... and yes, Kleenex would have been nice..."

Matthew Mack's "Conversations with My Molester: A Journey of Faith, directed by Daniel Gidron, playing at Boston Playwrights Theatre through January 22nd. For more information or to purchase tickets, please visit www.bostonplaywrights.org.

