

Seminarian John Tome

Biographical Information

YEAR OF BIRTH:	1949
YEAR OF DEATH:	
ORDINATION:	Failed out of seminary

Employment/Assignment History

9/03/1963 – 5/31/1967	St. Marks's Seminary High School, Erie PA
Unknown-5/14/1974	St. Mark's Major Seminary, Erie, PA

Summary

Very little is known about Seminarian John Tome. The subpoenaed Diocesan records contained only four documents. These documents include three documents that state his grades from high school and one letter from Rev. Salvatore Luzzi to Rev. Alban Maguire, Rector of Christ the King Seminary in St. Bonaventure, New York. Salvatore Luzzi is an accused sex offender in the Diocese of Erie (see Luzzi Narrative). This letter shed little light onto Tome's past, it only expressed that Tome had problems communicating with others while in seminary in 1974.

This investigation was able to locate several survivors of Tome's abuse. The Grand Jury heard testimony from and about five members of the same family that Tome had abused in the 1970s. The survivors reported that they were poor, dysfunctional, and dependent upon the diocese for their mother's employment at St. Brigid parish. Furthermore, the parents were befriended by the abusers and the family would often invite them over to engage in drinking parties. Each of the victims testified to the Grand Jury about similar statements that their abuser made to threaten them if they ever disclosed the abuse.

Victim #1 was a twelve year old girl living in the Meadville area who was abused in her home in the mid-1970s. She testified that Tome fondled her on one occasion and that Tome represented to her family that he was a Deacon in the Diocese of Erie at the time of the abuse. She recalled him wearing all black and displaying the trademark white collar that clergy wore. She reported that Tome, whom she knew as "Jack Tome" and Father Stephen Jeselnick would come to her home and drink with her parents until late at night. Stephen Jeselnick is an accused sex offender in the Diocese of Erie (See Jeselnick Narrative). She further testified that her mother worked for the Diocese, specifically, Monsignor Karg, during this time period. This victim testified that on one occasion after a night of drinking with her parents, her mother let Tome put her to bed after she had her night time bath. She testified that as she lay on her stomach in the top bed of a bunk bed, Tome placed his hand under her night gown, then under her panties to her buttocks. She told the Jurists that she was frozen with fear as he rubbed and squeezed her bare buttocks.

Summary

Victim #1 recalled that as Tome was fondling her, she held her arms tight to her body with her hands over her face. She didn't recall when he left the room or how long the assault lasted. She added that her memory was dark, and that she was only able to talk about the assault after Agents from the Attorney General's Office visited her. After some time, Victim #1 gained the courage to tell her mother what had happened. She said that her mother scolded her for trying to ruin Tome's life and reputation. She added that she believes that her mother informed Monsignor Karg of the incident because Tome "*disappeared for a while and then came back.*" It was this chain of events that made Victim #1 believe her mother told Karg, who in turn sent Tome away.

Much of Victim #1's testimony came in the form a written document that she prepared for the Grand Jury. She explained that reading the details even after so much time would still be difficult for her. Part of her letter read, "*The sexual and emotional torture I built in my head, one man, a man of God, had done so much harm that I was not prepared to face the realities or the gravity of the situation.*" She also wrote, "*This man corrupted my deepest belief system and tarnished my faith and modeled by distrust for others and made it difficult to develop meaningful or trusted relationships. I also developed poor self-image and low self-esteem, identity confusion, sexual confusion, early onset of depression, becoming a defiant teenager, suffering a strong sense of guilt and shame over the experience, and obsessive rumination over the abuse and recurring flashbacks.*"

Victim #2, the younger brother of Victim #1, was approximately eight or nine years old at the time of his abuse at the hands of the man he knew as Deacon Tome. He explained that at his age he did not know the difference between a Deacon and a Priest, however, he often saw Tome wearing vestments. Victim #2 testified that he never told anyone of the abuse for over 40 years. He testified that the abuse began in approximately 1974 and lasted for about a year and a half, occurring as often as once a week. He explained that it consisted of mostly oral sex. The act was performed on him and he was forced to perform the same on Tome. He was emotional as he testified, recalling his sexual abuse and remembering that he saw Tome naked, adding that Tome would often fondle him in front of his parents while they were all in the car together.

Victim #2 testified that he believes that Monsignor Karg knew full well of Tome's behavior, since he would often come over to the family home with Tome and drink with his parents. Victim #2 testified that once he would fall asleep, Tome would find him and sexually abuse him. He expressed anger and frustration that Karg did nothing about Tome's behavior. Victim #2 went on to testify that he feared his little brother also becoming a victim of Tome so he took the abuse, hoping that Tome would not turn his attention to the younger brother.

Victims #3 and #4 are the younger sisters of Victim #1 and asked that their testimony be read into the Grand Jury by an Agent of the Attorney General's Office. In an interview with them about their abuse at the hands of Deacon Tome, they expressed the belief that it would be too emotionally traumatic for them to tell their story in person to a large crowd. They indicated that their interview with the Agents would be the last time they ever wanted to speak of either their abuse or Deacon Tome.

Summary

Their abuse occurred separately after they went to bed and after Tome was done drinking with their parents, who they described as “*drunks.*” They were very emotional in telling their story, often pausing to regain their composure. Each family member reported that they worked very hard for several years to try to forget about the abuse. Some of the few details they did recall was that it occurred between 1973 and 1979, however they could not recall their exact ages.

Victim #3 said she was abused at least ten times and her sister, Victim #4, stated that she was abused less than ten times but more than five times. A few of the lingering details that they recalled were that Tome would often have a red hat on and that the abuse often involved a pool cue stick. Victim #3 reported that Tome would often attempt to penetrate her with the pool cue and that when she would cry out he would use his fingers to digitally penetrate her. Her sister, Victim #4 said that she did recall the pool cue but had blocked from her memory how Tome had used it on her. She did recall that he used his hands to abuse her.

All three of the sisters recalled how Tome would come to their house to drink and would often play hide and seek or tag with them. Victim #1 told the Agents that Tome would put his hands all over her and her sisters while playing these games. She said she didn’t think much of it when she was younger, however, after the abuse and getting older, she now sees that this horseplay was Tome’s way of groping the sisters.

Finally, the Grand Jury heard from Victim #5, who was between the ages of 10 to 13 years old when he was abused by both Tome and Jeselnick. He testified that Tome and Jeselnick would both engage him in oral sex and anally rape him. Victim #5 indicted that Tome’s abuse occurred at his home and that Jeselnick sexually abused him in the rectory of St. Brigid. He informed the Agents in his interview that he was abused ten to fifteen times, off and on with no regularity. He added that he is currently in therapy that is being paid for privately and that no assistance has been offered by the Diocese to date. This victim also testified that he observed both men naked and that he witnessed them sexually assaulting his sister, Victim #3, as well as his oldest sister, who is now deceased. It was the opinion of Victim #1 and her brother, who was not abused because he was in the military during this time frame, that the oldest and now deceased sister was also victimized by Tome and/or Jeselnick when she was a young girl. It is their belief that she was abused more than any of the other family members.