

Impact statement - AQ

I was born in April 1975. I am now 38 years old.

When I was 11 years old, Denis McAlinden came to Adamstown. He befriended my parents who were very involved in Parish life. He spent a lot of time at the school. Very soon after he arrived in the Parish, he was visiting our home several times a week in the evenings. Ours was a household full of girls.

Through my last two years at primary school in 1986 and 1987, this so-called priest sexually abused me in the presbytery, at the church, in my home, on the school playground, in his car, and during parish events and family outings to which he was frequently invited.

He got away with abusing me almost in front of people because everyone was blinded by his being a priest.

I have lived with so much pain because of this abuse of me. Some days I can barely function. The constant media is very hard although I am glad that the culture of secrecy is being exposed.

I am now a 38 year old mother of four. I have painstakingly tried to remain anonymous whilst dealing with all of this as I do not want the matters at hand to fall on the shoulders of my precious children. I do not want them to carry the burdens of my abuse throughout their lives and relive the pain I have lived with for so long.

I have carried the burdens of the Catholic Church for far too long and believe that the pain this has caused should stop here with me. I'm doing my best.

When news broke that the wrong doings of McAlinden had been brought to light, I was home alone with three of my children: the front page of the Newcastle Herald slapped me in the face hard. I was totally terrified- to the point where I repeatedly threw up for hours and could not talk to anyone for such a long time. My husband was away at the time. I remember it as a blurry, sickening haze. I remember not wanting to be alive.

Who else had he hurt? Were they my friends? My family? I was absolutely terrified. I felt like I was back there, like I was that little girl hiding something.

I felt that if anyone knew about me – if someone found out - that I would be in trouble. My terror continued for so long.

I didn't sleep (I still don't do that too well). I didn't eat and just tried to take it day by day. This went on for a long while until I finally had the courage to tell my husband. It was only with his support that, eventually, I too found the courage to speak out and report what had happened to me, 20 years after the abuse.

Life does not stop while I tried to deal with these things. I still have to try to carry on as usual, being a mum, a wife, and trying to run a business. All of these tasks I still find to this day so very hard. To everyone on the outside looking in, I may seem fine. I have become so good at hiding my terror and distress that no one really knows what goes on in my daily life. On the inside its pretty messy. It's ugly. I don't think that will ever go away. There's sadness, so much sadness - you become friends with sadness as it's here more days then it's not. You know some days will be better than others but sadness is always there and I suspect it will always be there.

Anger. Anger came later but has stayed for a long while and is not going anywhere. I want to know why? Why did no one stop him before he got to me? Can someone please tell me?

If only someone had stopped him before he did that to me.

I often wonder what life would have been like had this not happened to me? The pain I live with and do my best to deal with is there every single day. For the rest of my life I will wake up with that pain. Why was he involved so heavily with the school I attended? Why was he free to be around so many young innocent children?

If the Inquiry finds that there were people who knew about this and allowed this to happen, we the victims might find some peace knowing that at last, after all these years something has been done and someone has been held accountable.