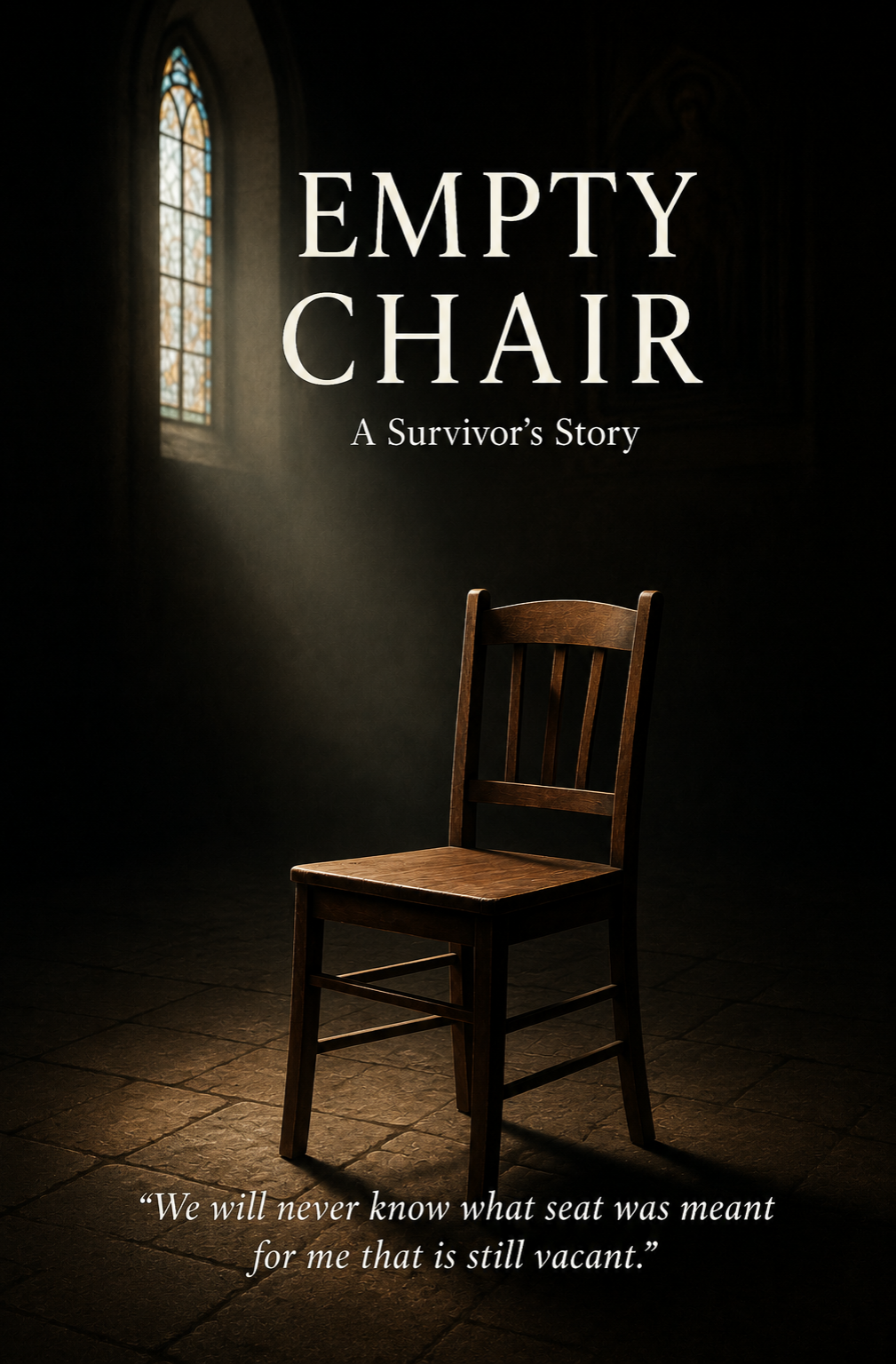


The image is a book cover for 'Empty Chair: A Survivor's Story'. It features a dark, moody interior scene. In the foreground, a simple wooden chair with a slatted back sits on a stone floor. A beam of light from a stained glass window in the upper left corner illuminates the chair and the floor. The background is dark and indistinct, suggesting a large, empty room.

EMPTY CHAIR

A Survivor's Story

*"We will never know what seat was meant
for me that is still vacant."*

The Empty Chair

Note

This booklet contains personal experiences and reflections from more than a generation ago. Some of the content may be difficult to read.

If reading this raises distressing emotions, please consider speaking to someone you trust or seeking professional support.

Situations today have improved significantly, but understanding the past helps us protect the future.



Introduction

Clerical abuse represents a profound betrayal of trust, where individuals within religious institutions exploit their positions of authority to inflict harm — physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological.

This abuse leaves lasting scars on survivors, erodes faith, and exposes systemic failures within religious hierarchies.

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This booklet explores these realities through personal experience. It highlights both the abuse itself and the silence that allowed it to continue. It also reflects on the long road to justice, healing, and meaning.

The symbol of the *empty chair* represents:

- Those driven away from their faith
- Absence of accountability
- Lost potential

While reform efforts continue, this booklet calls for continued transparency, justice, and survivor-centred care.

Overview of Clerical Abuse

Clerical abuse involves the misuse of spiritual authority to harm others. Its consequences are far-reaching:

- Long-term trauma
- Broken trust
- Fragmented communities

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Institutional Silence and Inaction

Beyond the abuse itself, the failure to act by those in power deepened the harm.

In many cases:

- Abusers were protected
- Victims were dismissed
- Institutions prioritised reputation over truth

The Symbolism of the Empty Chair

The empty chair represents:

- Survivors who left
- Voices not heard
- Justice not delivered

It is also a call to act — to ensure those chairs are no longer empty.

The Empty Chair

What happened to you is not your fault



Testimony

What Happened to me?

It was in the middle of a long hot and dry summer in the 70s. I needed a break from the isolation of the Isle of Wight. My mum recommended spending a week at a national scout camp helping to run activities there.

She told me about the camp warden, how he was well respected and was soon to go to seminary to train as a priest, so he was a great person to be around. He was known as Big T due to his size and name.

It was presumed that I would go to a seminary and eventually become a priest. I was 15 years old; Big T was in his 30's.

Big T seemed like a nice guy, friendly and always on hand to help and easy to approach. He was funny and put simply, fun to be around. That was until the morning when I was in the shower. Take a guess who turned up to watch me naked in the shower washing.

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I was aware that I was being watched.

It felt creepy and yes, I was scared.

Deep down, I hoped it was someone the same size as me, then I could shout at them or “push” them away if necessary.

I felt trapped, I felt powerless, I felt weak. I was vulnerable.

I turned my head and shoulders to see him. I was trapped on 3 sides by the walls of the shower cubicle with the entrance blocked by him. I had nowhere to run.

He made remarks to me about what part of myself I should wash carefully. He came closer. I cannot go into what else he did, I cannot live that again.

💔 Failure to acknowledge the truth.

There were many rumours about him. But I like to ignore rumours and think only of the truth. But here I now knew that the rumours were the truth. I needed to

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put a stop to this. But I was just a boy, what could I do other than to give that truth to others and trust that they will do something about it.

I reported the matter to the deputy camp warden; he told me to stop making up such nonsense. I went back to the Isle of Wight and back to my mum. I told her what had happened.

She slapped me around the face; ‘You silly little boy, he is well liked and well respected and he will become a priest, and we all know how we need more priest’. She warned me not to tell anyone else, especially my dad.

Desertion

I wanted to run away from my faith. How could I believe in a God whose church supported such behaviours? But where was I to run to?

The Holy Spirit was my guide. But I had doubts as to whether I could trust the Holy Spirit. I felt that a mother was always the one to trust. But my mother had slapped me in the face refusing to acknowledge

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my testimony. Who was deserting; or was I the deserted?

I had only one other mother to turn to.

Finding Comfort in Our Blessed Mother

In my darkest moments, when I felt abandoned by those I trusted most, I turned to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Where others dismissed me, she listened.

Where others judged, she showed gentleness.

I spoke to her not in formal prayer, but in honest conversation — as a child would speak to a loving mother.

I entrusted my fears, confusion, and pain to her. In doing so, I found something I had long been missing: **safety**.

Mary did not take away what had happened to me, but she walked with me through it.

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For anyone who feels unheard or abandoned, she offers quiet reassurance:

You are not alone, and your voice matters.

Child becomes an Adult

A few years had gone by. I had left school at 16. I had trust issues with anyone who told me what I can or cannot do. I had become single minded and more self-determined.

At 18, I joined the Royal Air Force. The war in the Falkland Islands shaped me to become less single minded and more collaborative. Fighting a war was to fight yourself. But I was no longer a child, I was an adult. I had to be accountable.

Visit to the Seminary

My Parish Priest had decided that I should become a Priest. For me, yes there was something, but I felt more of a call to the diaconate. But was I right or not?

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Was it that my single mindedness had decided that I would never be a priest because Big T would be?

I went to St John's Seminary in Womersley as part of a selection process. Take a guess who I saw in the corridor sat on a bench with a young seminarian on his lap as his hands drifted into places where they should not.

And this was in public.

I had trouble believing what I was seeing. A deacon came up to me and gave me some great advice. 'Keep well away from him, everyone here knows what he does, and he just seems to get away with it'.

I had a meeting with the Vice-Rector and then the Rector. Both individually told me that they take a great interest in the seminarians and have regular 1-1 meetings with each to support them on their journey.

If they were as good as their word, then they would have known what Big T was up to, after all, it was the talk of the seminary.

The Rector went on to become a Bishop, the Vice-Rector went on to become an Archbishop.

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Big T, The Deacon

I was at a meeting for the Catholic Scout Advisory Council. We had a mass and Big T was the Deacon. There was several other Priest, but of note was Bishop TM, his diocesan bishop and Bishop HT, an auxiliary from Southwark.

After the mass, I was having a great conversation with Bishop HT and about 5 minutes into our conversation, we overheard someone asking Big T how he would cope with celibacy. He fairly loudly replied, 'Celibacy does not apply to me because I am Homosexual'.

At this, HT stormed off and took TM aside. I was not concerned that HT had stormed off because I was confident of what he would be saying to TM about it.

From this, it was clear to me that Big T would be continuing his sexual life with children, even after ordination as a priest.

Personally, I would have no objection to a priest being homosexual as long as they remain celibate.

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The Arrest

37 years after my confrontation with Big T, he was arrested. This was a high-profile case launched on the fallout of the Jimmy Saville enquiry. The police had appealed for others to come forward. There was nothing specific about what he was arrested for, though it was of no surprise for me, just a relief.

I spoke to my Parish Priest, who passed this to diocesan child protection officer who passed it to the metropolitan police. I felt supported at last and had the hand of warmth from Our Mother, Mary.

The police would not (could not) tell me what had happened to the many others. As the trial progressed, I came to realise that many others had suffered far more than me with a suspicion of at least 1 death attributable to the activities. But at last, after 37 years, I was listened to and believed.

The trial, being of high profile, was reported on the internet daily.

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The Moment of Forgiveness

For many years, I was told that one day I might forgive the person who had abused me.

My response was always the same:
there was no chance.

The pain was too deep.

During the investigation and trial, I was supported by the Police and the Crown Prosecution Service.

For the first time, I felt heard.

I was invited to attend court for sentencing. The Police chauffeured me from home to the court. When the judge spoke and announced that he was to be jailed, something changed within me.

In that moment, from my heart, through God, to my perpetrator, I said:

“I forgive you unconditionally for everything you ever did to me.”

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This did not excuse what happened.

It did not remove the pain.

But it gave me peace.

It allowed me to draw a line — not over what happened, but over how it would define me.

Forgiveness, for me, was not about the perpetrator. It was about reclaiming myself.

Each person's journey is different. Forgiveness cannot be forced, and it is not required for healing.

What happened to you is not your fault.

What Seat is empty?

We have empty seats, from those who have deserted their faith because of how a leader of that faith treated them. But what about those who were able to remain with their faith but perhaps do not occupy the right seat? I can't help but wonder what seat was meant for

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me. Is it still vacant because of what happened to me with no one believing me? We will never know.



Confronting Silence

In recent years, efforts to address clerical abuse have gained momentum, driven by the courage of survivors who have come forward to share their experiences and seek justice. Investigations, public inquiries, and media coverage have exposed the systemic nature of the issue, compelling society to take accountability.

While leaders like Pope Francis have advocated for transparency and accountability, issuing public apologies and implementing preventive measures, critics argue that these efforts must be complemented by deeper collaboration with civil authorities and stricter consequences for those complicit in covering up abuses.

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Safeguarding Today: A Changing Church

Since the time of my experience, safeguarding in the Catholic Church in the United Kingdom has undergone significant reform.

Today, there are:

- Diocesan safeguarding offices
- Mandatory reporting procedures
- Collaboration with police and civil authorities
- Training and vetting for clergy and volunteers
- Independent oversight (CSSA)

admin@catholicsafeguarding.org.uk

These changes reflect an important shift:

 From protecting reputation

 To protecting people

While no system is perfect, survivors today are more likely to be heard and supported.

This does not erase the past — but it helps protect the future.

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Pathways to Reform

True healing requires:

- Listening to survivors
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Structural reform

Moving Forward

What happened to me will always be part of my story
— but it is not the whole of it.

I have found a way to move forward — not by
forgetting, but by growing.

Today, I serve as a catechist.

I am committed to:

- Creating safe spaces
- Listening without judgement
- Supporting those in need

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My experience has strengthened my determination to help others.

I have been writing since December 1982, but mostly in note or essay format. Today, I bring these together in books.

Something painful has become something purposeful.

Conclusion

The empty chair remains a powerful symbol.

But it does not have to remain empty.

Through:

- truth
- accountability
- compassion

We can begin to replace absence with presence, silence with voice, and harm with healing.

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Ultimately, this booklet is both a testament to the resilience of survivors and a call to conscience. The path forward must be paved with accountability, compassion, and systemic reform — ensuring that no more chairs remain empty, and no more voices go unheard. Only then can faith communities begin to reclaim their moral authority and rebuild what has been broken.

Support

In the United Kingdom, you can contact:

- Your Parish or Diocesan Safeguarding Officer. (Details can be found on a google search).
- **The Samaritans** – call 116 123 (free, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year). They will listen without judgement.
- **Mind** – call 0300 123 3393 or visit [mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk) for mental health information and support.
- **Your GP** – for referral to NHS talking therapies or specialist services.

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- **The Catholic Mental Health Project** – catholicmentalhealthproject.org.uk – resources linking faith and mental well-being.

If you are a young person, you can contact:

- **Childline** – call 0800 1111 – free, confidential, for anyone under 19.
- **YoungMinds** – youngminds.org.uk – mental health support for young people and parents.

There is no shame in reaching out. The Martyrs leaned on their fellow prisoners. They wrote letters of encouragement. They received the sacraments.

They did not walk alone. Neither should you.