



WGBH
125 Western Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02134
617.300.3500
Fax: 617.300.1001



**FRONTLINE EXPLORES ONE FAMILY'S CONFRONTATION
WITH CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE BY CATHOLIC CLERGY**

**FRONTLINE presents
*HAND OF GOD***

Tuesday, January 16, 2007, at 9 P.M. ET on PBS

www.pbs.org/frontline/handofgod

In recent decades, more than 10,000 children were reportedly sexually abused by Catholic priests in the United States. In *Hand of God*, airing Tuesday, Jan. 16, 2007, at 9 P.M. ET on PBS (check local listings), filmmaker Joe Cultrera explores the very personal story of how his brother — Paul — was molested in the 1960s by their parish priest, Father Joseph Birmingham, who allegedly abused nearly 100 other children. Producer Joe Cultrera tells the story of faith betrayed and how his brother Paul and his family fought back against a scandal that continues to afflict scores of churches across the country.

"I was inspired by my brother's strength of spirit in surviving his abuse," says Joe Cultrera. "His story was unlike any I had seen in the media. I thought a detailed film about his and my family's experience would prove healing and freeing for others."

Paul Cultrera and his siblings were raised in an Italian-Catholic family in Salem, Mass., and attended an all-Catholic school from kindergarten through high school. From an early age, Paul and his siblings were immersed in the beliefs and teachings of the Catholic Church.

"There was the Catholic Church and everything else was hell," Paul recalls. "Everyone beyond the bounds of the Catholic Church was doomed. Everything was presented to you in terms of sin."

At 14, Paul became an altar boy at St. James Parish and came under the guidance of Father Birmingham. Birmingham was young and friendly, often taking the boys on trips and inviting them to the rectory for Friday and Saturday night pizza parties. It was during the routine rite of confession that Paul's relationship with Father Birmingham changed.

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“Being as brainwashed as I was, I would actually tell him what I had done: ‘Bless me Father, I have sinned. It's been one week since my last confession and I lied two times,” recalls Paul.

He went on to confess that he lied to his mother and masturbated. And recalls Father Birmingham's response, “‘It's kind of normal for boys your age, but it can be a real problem and so we're going to have to work with this.’”

The confession of masturbation led to private “counseling” sessions at the rectory, where Paul was sexually abused. The pattern of abuse also took place during nighttime rides in Birmingham's black Ford Galaxie and on trips out of town.

“When you're totally wrapped up in the environment of sin and guilt, you internalize it yourself. At least I did. I decided it was my fault. It was something the matter with me,” says Paul “You think you've done something really bad. So you become very adept at drawing a huge circle around that part of your life.”

Paul would keep his secret for nearly 30 years until he decided to finally confront the Church and launch his own private investigation into whether the Archdiocese of Boston had covered up allegations against Birmingham by moving the priest from parish to parish, thereby placing more children in danger.

“It seemed clear that this organization was protecting him. There was nothing exceptional about Joe Birmingham so there were probably a lot of other priests that were being treated the same way,” says Paul.

After this realization, Paul began to place advertisements in the newspapers of the various towns where Birmingham had been posted. The advertisements asked the simple question, “Do You Remember Father Birmingham?”

The dozens of responses Paul received were his first indication that he was certainly not Birmingham's only victim.

"Yeah, I was molested; my brother was molested; my other brother was molested; my friends were molested," recalled one victim from Sudbury, Mass., where Birmingham had had his first assignment.

In a homegrown detective story, the film follows Birmingham's trail and the cover-up instituted by his superiors. *Hand of God* is a frankly told tale of betrayal. In balancing faith against outrage, the Cultrera

family survive it all with their humanity and humor intact.

“The film created an opportunity for my family to deal with these issues in a very intimate way,” says Joe. “We have emerged as a more understanding unit. One of my hopes is that the film will inspire other families to talk.”

Hand of God is a Zingerplatz Pictures production for WGBH/FRONTLINE. The film is produced, directed, and written by Joe Cultrera. The film is co-produced by Laura Corwin and Hugh Walsh. FRONTLINE is produced by WGBH Boston and is broadcast nationwide on PBS. Funding for FRONTLINE is provided through the support of PBS viewers and by the Park Foundation. Additional funding for *Hand of God* is provided by the Jerome Foundation. FRONTLINE is closed-captioned for deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers and described for people who are blind or visually impaired by the Media Access Group at WGBH. FRONTLINE is a registered trademark of WGBH Educational Foundation. The FRONTLINE executive producer for special projects is Michael Sullivan. The executive producer for FRONTLINE is David Fanning.

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Promotional photography can be downloaded from the PBS pressroom.

Press contacts

Diane Buxton	(617) 300-5375
Phil Zimmerman	(617) 300-5366