

First assaulted by a priest, then a nun, NJ woman's suit says clergy abuse ruined her life

[Deena Yellin](#), NorthJersey Published 5:05 a.m. ET Feb. 28, 2020

A New Jersey law that took effect in 2019 lifts the statute of limitations on decades-old sexual abuse claims. NorthJersey

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For decades, Trish Cahill says, she carried a dark secret.

The Ridgewood native, now 67, says she suffered years of sexual abuse as a young child at the hands of a Catholic priest who the church knew was a pedophile.

The assault allegedly carried an extra layer of betrayal: the priest, the Rev. Daniel Francis Millard, was also her uncle, and Cahill said her accusations have caused a decades-long rift in her family. The experience left her vulnerable to later exploitation by a nun with a Morris County-based order who she met as a teenager, she said.

But now, years later, Cahill is speaking out. She's chronicled her tale in newspaper articles, a blog and a book she hopes to publish. Earlier this month, she sued the Catholic Diocese of Camden, her late uncle's employer, becoming the latest alleged victim to take advantage of [a new state law lifting the statute of limitations on abuse cases](#).

"We need to protect the children of today so they don't become victims tomorrow," said Cahill, a retired teacher who now lives in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

The suit is one of dozens filed against the state's five Catholic dioceses since Dec. 1, when the new law took effect. Cahill alleges the Camden diocese, where Millard served from 1953 until his death in 1973, knew about the priest's proclivities and shuffled him between parishes six times over the course of 16 years to hide his transgressions.



Trish Cahill says she has suffered in silent shame for many years following her abuse, but now she's speaking out and filing a lawsuit. (Photo: Trish Cahill)

The Camden Diocese denies her claim and says it's never received any other complaints regarding Daniel Millard.

Cahill said her allegations have enraged many of her relatives, who have stopped speaking to her. A brother, when contacted by a reporter, refused to comment.

"My family blamed me," she said in an interview, adding that she moved to Pennsylvania in 1997 because they "disowned me."

According to the lawsuit, Millard began sexually abusing Cahill in 1957, when she was five, and continued for eight years. "I used to wrap myself up in my blanket so he couldn't get to me," she recalled. But he did anyway, she said.

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The diocese should have known that Millard was a danger to children because it had prior knowledge about the risk he posed, Cahill's complaint said. Millard had other victims, including five girls she knew as children, but all are afraid to speak publicly, she said.

Millard was moved roughly six times in 16 years, beginning in 1953 at Holy Saviour Church in Westmont, New Jersey, and thereafter at churches in Barrington, Camden, and Brooklawn, according to BishopAccountability.org, a website that tracks clergy abuse allegations.

Cahill points to that as proof of Millard's guilt, and investigations by prosecutors in Pennsylvania and other states have documented a pattern of the church moving "problem" priests to avoid detection.

But Camden Diocese spokesman Mike Walsh said it's not unusual for clergy to be shifted around as needed, and Millard never generated any other complaints. A year ago, when Camden and the other four

dioceses [released a list of 188 "credibly accused" priests and deacons](#), Millard's name wasn't among them.

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Cahill's older sister, Marylou, was also one of Millard's victims, said her son, Billy Fogel of San Diego. His mother passed away in June, but she revealed to Fogel and his older brother years ago that Millard had sexually abused her, he said in an interview.

"I think she had a very painful life," Fogel said. "There was an expectation at that time that when something like this happens you don't talk about it and bring shame to your family."

Both of Cahill's parents are deceased.

A letter from Behavioral Healthcare Consultants in Lancaster, provided by Cahill's attorney, stated that Cahill suffers from severe depression and anxiety as well as post traumatic stress disorder due to "severe and repeated sustained sexual and physical abuse."

And in a 2004 letter to Cahill obtained by The Record and NorthJersey.com, Joseph Galante, then the bishop of Camden, apologized for abuse that "you may have suffered at the hands of those in the church."

Nonetheless, the diocese still considers the allegations unproven. Besides the lack of other complaints against Millard, "a thorough review of his personnel file and record, as well as the statements from Ms. Cahill's relatives, prompted the conclusion that this accusation could

not be determined as credible," Walsh, the spokesman, said in an e-mail last week.

Cahill was raised in a large, devout Irish Catholic family in Ridgewood. Everyone was proud to have a priest in the family, and referred to Millard as "Father Dan."



A photo of the Rev

Daniel Millard and his mother. Trish Cahill alleges Millard, her uncle, abused her for years. (Photo: Courtesy of Trish Cahill)

But under cover of that status, Millard assaulted his niece in his car, in rectories in Ridgewood and Camden, at his mother's Ridgewood home and in a confessional at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, his niece said.

Millard convinced her that the abuse was her fault, she said: "He threatened me with hell and threatened to get my baby sister if I told anyone." Cahill, raised to harbor a blind allegiance to clergy, obliged.

The abuse left her feeling broken and depressed, and made her easy prey for others, she said.

Years later, while a student at Paramus Catholic Girls High School, Cahill said, she sought help from Sister Eileen Shaw, a nun from the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth, an apostolic congregation based in Morris Township.

Cahill opened up to her about her painful past, and Shaw, then 36, allegedly showered her with attention, buying her gifts and taking her on trips. As they grew closer, Shaw pulled the teen into a world of gambling, sex, alcohol and drugs, according to Cahill.

Other nuns in the convent "had to have known what was happening," said Cahill. "I was always taken up the back staircase to share a bed with this older woman" but they did nothing about it.

Cahill, in 1994, received an out-of-court-settlement from the Sisters of Charity. The agreement included a confidentiality clause that barred her from talking about the case.

Donna Sartor-Halatin, a Sisters of Charity spokeswoman, said the group acted responsibly. "The case was investigated immediately when it was reported in 1994 and a settlement was reached that was mutually agreed on by all parties," she said in a written statement.

Shaw was removed from ministry during the investigation, Sartor-Halatin said, declining to answer other questions.

But in a 2015 newsletter published by the order, Shaw is prominently listed, along with a smiling photograph, among those celebrating their 60-year anniversary as nuns.

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Robert Hoatson, a Livingston-based advocate for clergy abuse victims, denied Cahill's case was handled appropriately. About three years ago, Shaw was put in charge of liturgies at Sunday Masses at the College of Saint Elizabeth Chapel in Convent Station that were open to the public, including children, Hoatson said.

After Hoatson protested, officials at the Sisters of Charity told him they removed her, he said.

Shaw, 86, now lives in a Sisters of Charity retirement community in New Jersey. Reached by phone this week, she initially sounded cheerful until a reporter uttered Cahill's name.

She cut off the conversation, saying "I have no comment," and hung up.

Cahill said years of abuse left her with emotional struggles and confusion over her sexual identity. She found solace in alcohol and drugs, plunging into years of addiction, she said.

"I wasn't able to have an intimate relationship with anyone," she said. "I wasn't even able to build normal friendships because I don't trust anyone."

Although Millard never appeared on the list of credibly accused clergy, his name was inscribed for years on a plaque at the College of the Holy Cross, in Worcester, Massachusetts, where the priest graduated. An art center was named in his memory decades ago after Millard's brother donated funds.

Cahill asked the school to remove the plaque 15 years ago, but in a 2005 letter, the college said it had no knowledge of any illicit behavior and that Cahill's relatives did not agree to the change.

Earlier this month, however, a school spokesman told The Record that the plaque was recently removed at the request of relatives, and that the center would be renamed for the entire Millard family.

Now sober for 13 years, Cahill boasts of her 28-year-career as an elementary school teacher and her activism in support groups for clergy abuse victims.

"I want to do what I can to prevent this from ever happening to anyone again," she said. "I'm not going to die with an untold story inside of me."

Deena Yellin covers religion for NorthJersey.com. For unlimited access to her work covering how the spiritual intersects with our daily lives, [please subscribe or activate your digital account today.](#)

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