

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I am a film editor - by trade and by personality - more than willing to let others be the public face of the work I do. Every few years when the Ghost urges me, I quietly pull back the curtain and initiate the proceedings

Several years ago my brother Paul suggested I try writing a book about his experiences with the Boston Catholic Corporation (B.C.C.). Back in 1964, a Catholic priest in our hometown of Salem, Massachusetts had sexually abused Paul at the Catholic school we both attended. After spending thirty years in a dark box of silence, he initiated his own investigation, uncovering some startling abuses of body and power. This occurred many years before these deceptions hit the headlines.

When Paul asked me about writing that book, I was busy with television edit gigs. Besides, I was a guy with more visions than words.

Time passed. I watched as the story of Catholic clergy abuse hit the press and then the TV screen. Every video piece started the same way - church music, images of ceremony and stained glass. It was an obvious and easy trap - but it immediately yielded the tone of those stories to the institution. I felt there was something deeper worth digging for - a story about the overwhelming power of Catholic indoctrination and the brave individuals who had summoned their own spirits to move beyond the music and the icons.

Then there were the TV clergy abuse victims. They stood sadly in the focus of lenses with adolescent snapshots propped beneath their chins. They pleaded with the church for reform. While everyone has their own way of working through torment, I did not recognize my brother in any of these public faces of this crisis. His is the face of a survivor, internally wounded by his experience, but not asking the world for pity or the Church for change. He refuses to surrender them his smile. It doesn't matter to him if a Bishop resigns or if the Corporation is forced to change its policies. That Corporation no longer has any moral authority over his life. My brother has found the power of self-reliance.

I knew my brother's story: we had grown up in the same house; attended the same school and knew all the main characters. As time went on I had participated in his investigation and saw how he was treated. I was interested in how family's like ours had survived all this. We had been sucked in, chewed up, spit out. All the forced latent compassion I was now hearing from the B.C.C. was ringing dull church bells. There was certainly an untold level to this story. And it needed to be told by people who had lived the details. It would involve criticism that might sound inappropriate and questionable if related by outsiders.

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So I thought about a film. It would be a way for my brother to tell his story - the story of people like him, and families like ours - as if he was reading the book he wanted me to write. He would be the one giving the sermon, and the clergy would be forced to sit quietly and listen. By focusing on one person's story I would not have to skip the details that allowed it all to happen. The film would avoid the drone of organs and move to its own room tones. It would not rely on the iconic imagery the Church forced down our throats; instead it would twist those religious dioramas into unsettling expressions of the internal torrent they immersed us in.

Late in 2002 I got word from my parents that the B.C.C. had set a date to close their neighborhood church - St Mary's Italian Church of Salem, Massachusetts. This was the church - down the street from my parent's house - that my family grew up attending. It was built through the donations of several generations of neighbors. Every statue and stained glass window was dedicated to relatives and friends. Though I was now a recovering Catholic and no longer attended mass, I certainly appreciated what St.

Mary's meant to the neighborhood. It was the center of that community. The Corporation had decided this community was now expendable. Lawsuits were pending, donations were dipping and the B.C.C. needed an influx of money. The Bishops decided to cash in St. Mary's - it was debt free and sitting in a prime Salem location.

The arc of my storyline stood clearly before me. An unbroken line: from abuse of the sons to abuse of the parents. Between those two points were decades of lying, cover-ups and blatant theft - and in the wake of all that many shattered souls laid scattered.

Sometimes you make a film and sometimes a film makes you. *Hand of God* began as a nagging itch, built as a slow burn and ended with a familial handshake. It was painful and therapeutic. The film initiated an indirect cross-country dialogue between my brother, my parents, my sister and me. It took a lot of hanging around - my family becoming familiar with the camera, while my collaborators learned the house rules. We felt our way around in the dark, eventually understanding when it was time to turn on the camera and when it was better to just sit at the kitchen table and eat a bowl of spaghetti. Holy Ghosts guided us.

Hand of God is a film by my brother that I brought to video. It's an interpretative dance. A weird visual mambo trotted around a straightforward narrative of a crooked happening. It is inside out - on the outside a no-nonsense re-telling of occurrences, on the inside a brew of confusions, silences and dreams. While this film probably moves me to the brink of Excommunication, its muck of memory frames - swirling in murky holy water - is my own Baptism into self-reliance. It is my most essential, spiritual and honest of breaths.