

SPOTLIGHT REPORT

Private schools, painful secrets

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This story was reported by Spotlight team reporters Jenn Abelson, Bella English, Jonathan Saltzman, and Todd Wallack, with editors Scott Allen and Amanda Katz.

[Update: Report names 12 at Choate Rosemary Hall who allegedly abused students](#)

Steven Starr reached into the back of his hallway closet and fished out the old camera, a gift nearly 50 years ago from the man he says molested him.

“It’s like a talisman or a grim reminder,” he said, holding the dusty Minolta Autocord in his Los Angeles apartment. Not that he could ever forget what he alleges happened to him when he was 11 at the Fessenden School.

In 1968, he was a lonely sixth-grader from Long Island when he met James Dallmann, a Harvard graduate who taught geography at the all-boys private school in West Newton and was an avid photographer.

Dallmann took Starr under his wing. He made the boy his apprentice and encouraged him to visit the teacher’s bedroom in their dorm at Moore Hall after lights out to learn how to use his makeshift darkroom. The teacher photographed Starr and delighted the boy by giving him the twin-lens Minolta.

Then one night, Starr said, Dallmann served him a mix of Tang and vodka, got him to

pose naked for pictures on a bed, and performed oral sex on him. This is our secret, Dallmann told Starr, who said the abuse went on for about a year.

For nearly half a century, Starr kept his feelings of betrayal and humiliation inside, sharing his story only with therapists and a few confidants.

But now he is among a growing number of former students at New England private schools who are breaking their silence about sexual abuse by staffers. They are emboldened by a cascade of recent revelations about cases — many of them decades old — that were often ignored or covered up when first reported, and that school administrators still struggle to handle appropriately today.

This video interview with sexual abuse survivor Steven Starr contains content that some viewers may find disturbing. Viewer discretion is advised.

So far this year, at least eight New England private schools have launched or disclosed sexual misconduct investigations. At least five of the probes — at [St. George's School](#) in Rhode Island, [Taft School](#) in Connecticut, Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, Thayer Academy in Braintree, and Concord Academy in Concord — have led to staff members being placed on administrative leave or fired.

The troubles go way beyond those institutions. At least 67 private schools in New England have faced accusations since 1991 that staffers sexually abused or harassed more than 200 students, the Spotlight Team found through an examination of court cases, as well as interviews with alumni, relatives, school officials, and attorneys.

At least 90 lawsuits or other legal claims have been filed on behalf of the alleged victims, and at least 37 school employees were fired or forced to resign because of the allegations. In addition, nearly two dozen eventually pleaded guilty or were convicted

on criminal charges of abusing children or related crimes.

The Globe also found 11 cases in which private school employees who were accused of sexual misconduct went on to work at other schools — an echo of the Catholic church scandal in which abusive priests were often moved to other parishes. At St. George's School alone, at least three staff members accused of misconduct have gone on to jobs where they faced subsequent sexual misconduct allegations involving children, including one teacher accused in a lawsuit of abusing a teenager in Hawaii.

Look up details on a specific school

More than five dozen private schools in New England have faced reports that their staff sexually abused or harassed students. Select a school from the dropdown menu below to explore the claims.

Note: If a school is not on this list and you think it should be, please email spotlight@globe.com or fill out [this short survey](#).

Large as those numbers of cases and victims are, they almost certainly underestimate the problem. No central database exists of allegations against private school employees, who are typically not required to be licensed. And schools often keep the reports confidential, even when payments are made to alleged victims. And it can sometimes take decades for survivors of sexual abuse to find the strength to come forward, if they do so at all.

One 1957 graduate of Deerfield Academy waited until 2013 to allege that he had been

repeatedly raped and groped by an art teacher starting as a freshman, 60 years earlier. An accomplished arts administrator who had also struggled with nightmares, anxiety, and depression, Truman Reed Jr. had never even told his wife what had happened.

“Will I ever be completely free of the trauma I experienced at Deerfield? No,” Reed wrote to the school’s head. The teacher, Robert Bliss, died in 1981. Deerfield officials said they couldn’t substantiate the allegations, but last August the school settled for almost \$100,000 with Reed’s estate. He had died six months earlier.

There is no research available on the prevalence of abuse at private schools and whether it is more common than in public schools, where one federal study found nearly 10 percent of students are targets of unwanted sexual attention by educators in grades K-12. But boarding schools, in particular, present unique opportunities for educators to have close contact with students. Students often go weeks or months without seeing their families, while spending time with staff before and after classes and living alongside them in dorms.

The schools, many with rich histories and famed alumni, have often struggled to balance the need to respond robustly to abuse allegations with a desire to guard their reputations. Historically, few allegations were reported to law enforcement, and many schools avoid publicizing them even today. Getting past the schools’ reticence is a challenge; because these are private institutions, they are exempt from public records laws. And when [the Globe sent surveys](#) to 224 private schools on their experience with sexual misconduct allegations, only 23 — about 10 percent — chose to reply.

Survivors of abuse are now trying to change this culture, simply by telling their stories. Last December, the Globe revealed the ordeal of Anne Scott, who as a young woman was pressured into signing a gag order about her alleged rape by St. George’s then-

athletic trainer Al Gibbs. Since Scott's revelations, lawyers for victims say they have received credible allegations that nearly 50 alumni were sexually abused — most by staff, some by other students.

This video interview with sexual abuse survivor Anne Scott contains content that some viewers may find disturbing. Viewer discretion is advised.

In March, after questions from a Globe reporter, Phillips Exeter Academy acknowledged it had failed to disclose that an award-winning teacher and administrator, Rick Schubart, had admitted in recent years to sexual misconduct with two students in the 1970s and 1980s. Instead, Phillips Exeter quietly forced Schubart out in 2011 and barred him from campus in 2015. Within days of the Globe story, alumni reported new allegations about other teachers, including one who was then fired.

“People who would behave badly or would commit wrong acts can be right under our nose,” said Peter Upham, executive director of The Association of Boarding Schools, which censured former Exeter principal Tom Hassan for not having disclosed the misconduct before the association gave Schubart an award in 2012. “I was as shocked as anyone when this news came to light . . . Honestly, [Schubart] was an icon in the private school universe.”

Even when schools try to confront decades-old abuse, finding the right course is challenging. [Fessenden sent a letter to alumni](#) in 2011 identifying one alleged abuser, but the school has come under fire for not naming others accused by 12 alumni, including Starr, who have come forward since then. Headmaster David Stettler said he has no reason to doubt the allegations but hesitated to expand on the original letter out of concern for the privacy of victims.

Share information about sexual misconduct at private schools with the Boston Globe Spotlight team by completing [this request for information](#).

“It’s awfully hard to know what the next right thing to do is,” Stettler said. “There’s no blueprint about how to handle a horrible history like this.”

On Thursday, in anticipation of the publication of this article, he sent a letter updating the Fessenden community on the ballooning allegations but named no additional alleged abusers.

For Starr, the school’s actions are inadequate, and he has become impatient enough to speak publicly about his experience.

“I want [Fessenden] to take complete responsibility for what I now know to be a history of lies and deceptions around what was going on there,” said the 58-year-old filmmaker, who is writing a book about his ordeal. “All these stories, they’re the tip of the iceberg of a history of abuse, of privilege, of secrecy, of broken lives.”

“Nothing ... ever happened in the school”

The story made national news on Dec. 9, 1977. [“Lucrative Child-Sex-For-Sale Ring Involved Prominent Men,”](#) read one headline in a Fitchburg newspaper.

Police had arrested 15 men in three states who were among 24 indicted by a Suffolk County grand jury on child molestation charges. Many had paid \$5 to \$25 for sex acts with boys as young as 9 in a house in Revere.

Among those charged with sex offenses were two men employed for years by the exclusive Fessenden School: Arthur P. Clarridge, the school’s assistant headmaster,

who had resigned shortly before his arrest; and Dallmann, a longtime teacher.

Clarridge, now 88 and living in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., later admitted that he paid to have sex with 20 boys some 40 times over five years at the Revere address. But the charges against him were dismissed, he recently told the Globe, after he helped the state by testifying against a Back Bay child psychiatrist also ensnared in the alleged pedophile ring. Dallmann, whose case records couldn't be found at Suffolk Superior Court, died in 1986 at the age of 44.

At the time of the arrests, Robert P.T. Coffin Jr., the headmaster of Fessenden, which had more than 300 boarding and day students in kindergarten through ninth grade, issued a statement to parents expressing "considerable shock," adding, "We certainly are sorry for Mr. Clarridge and Mr. Dallmann."

Fortunately, Coffin told the Globe at the time, "Nothing to my knowledge has ever happened in the school."

That wasn't true, and Coffin knew it, former students say 40 years later. One says he went to Coffin about seven years before the arrests to say Clarridge had molested him.

John Sweeney entered Fessenden in 1969 at the age of 11. The son of a Newton surgeon, he played on the hockey team.

Clarridge was Sweeney's math teacher and dorm master at Hart Hall. The teacher was a hockey fan and invited Sweeney to watch Bruins games on the TV in his room. He took the student for rides in his sleek blue Corvette.

One night Sweeney was in bed when Clarridge came by. He noticed that the boy had a bad cold.

“Geez, Johnny, you don’t feel so well,” Sweeney recalled Clarridge saying.

“No, Mr. Clarridge, I’m all stuffed up,” Sweeney replied.

Clarridge took out what appeared to be a Vick’s Inhaler and encouraged Sweeney to take a whiff.

This video interview with sexual abuse survivor John Sweeney contains content that some viewers may find disturbing. Viewer discretion is advised.

Sweeney believes he was drugged. The next thing he knew, Sweeney recalled, he awakened to find Clarridge giving him oral sex while the teacher masturbated.

“I screamed,” Sweeney, 57, said tearfully, during an interview. “And he falls off the bed, pulls his pants up, telling me, ‘It’s lights out.’”

The next day, Sweeney said, he called his mother to tell her what had happened. But she had met Clarridge and was charmed by his Harvard University credentials; she didn’t believe her son.

So, at the age of 12, Sweeney went to Coffin’s office.

“He put his pipe down, tapped it in the ashtray real hard, and goes, ‘Come now, Johnny, come now. You’ve got a vivid imagination,’” Sweeney recalled.

Sweeney, who went on to serve as a Green Beret, believes his abuse by Clarridge led to his post-traumatic stress disorder, drug abuse, and troubles with the law.

Clarridge recently told the Globe that he never had sexual relations with any Fessenden student, although he acknowledged having sex with boys under the age of

consent in Revere.

“Even if my memory is poor, I certainly know that [Sweeney’s allegation] is not true,” he said.

For Adrian Hooper, who began attending Fessenden in the early 1960s at age 11, the climate of abuse at the school was so distressing that he finally ran away.

One winter day around 1964, Hooper said, he wet his bed, infuriating his dorm master, Claude Hasbrouck, who was also the school’s glee club and drama director. Children feared Hasbrouck, who was known for squeezing the flesh under boys’ chins — “chinnies,” he called them — and for his Nazi memorabilia collection, including a Nazi flag on his apartment wall.

This time, Hasbrouck made the 13-year-old Hooper drop his pants and underwear, then spanked him with a paddle.

Hasbrouck then began stroking Hooper’s penis and urged him to stop wetting his bed, Hooper said. When Hooper got an erection, Hasbrouck suddenly squeezed his testicles hard, hurting him.

The next day, Hooper said, he put on his warmest clothes and ran away in a snowstorm.

“I was crying. I was raging,” recalled Hooper, 64, who says he trudged several miles along the highway to the Boston University gymnasium, where he took refuge in the boys’ locker room and fell asleep on a pile of wet towels. “I came to the conclusion that I could not trust adults.” Hooper later became addicted to drugs, but he is clean now and runs an online resource for people with substance abuse problems.

This video interview with sexual abuse survivor Adrian Hooper contains content that some viewers may find disturbing. Viewer discretion is advised.

Hasbrouck left Fessenden in 1972, according to a school spokesman, and died in 1997. Hooper said he was expelled shortly after he ran away.

Like Hooper, former student Steven Starr struggled for years with drugs and alcohol — and with intimacy — after what he said were at least half a dozen episodes of abuse by Dallmann, starting in 1968. And Dallmann wasn't his only molester, he said. The school psychologist, Mickey Clampit, came to his bedroom one night and fondled him under the covers, he said, and attempted to do so other times as well.

Two other former Fessenden students told the Globe that Clampit abused them, too. One, who said Clampit fondled him at school and on a trip to Arkansas and Mexico, sent the school a letter demanding compensation for the abuse through attorney Mitchell Garabedian in 2015. The other man, who settled a claim against Fessenden in the 1990s, said Clampit was among four people there who abused him.

Clampit, who left Fessenden in 1976 and whose license to practice psychology in Massachusetts expired in 1996, could not be reached for comment at any of his known addresses or through his family. But his niece, Michelle Clampit of Los Angeles, said she never heard such accusations about him and was puzzled why they were surfacing now.

Starr said he was too ashamed to tell anyone about the abuse at the time and felt helpless to stop it. He has no doubt that other staff in the insular school knew what their colleagues were doing to him, he says, and is convinced that Hasbrouck, the drama teacher, cast him as a flirtatious cowgirl in the all-boys student production of

“Oklahoma” for the abusers’ amusement.

As Dallmann took pictures and Starr’s parents watched in the audience, the boy, in a dress and bonnet, sang words that had secret, painful overtones for him: “I’m just a girl who cain’t say no.”

“This is exactly what happened to me”

It took Marshall more than 40 years to bring himself to look into what had become of one of his former teachers at St. George’s, Bill Lydgate.

What he found, when he searched online in 2014, was the story of a \$30 million lawsuit against Lydgate from 2008, filed thousands of miles away in Hawaii, for alleged sexual misconduct that sounded all too familiar.

“I thought, this is exactly what happened to me. This is exactly how this guy operated. It’s real. Forty-five years later, he’s still doing it,” said Marshall, who asked to be identified only by his middle name.

Marshall was a soft-spoken freshman at St. George’s in 1968 when he met Lydgate, a cool and charismatic young English teacher who offered private guitar lessons to students in his apartment on campus.

Lydgate encouraged the introverted boy to call him by his first name and found ways to spend time together outside music lessons: He drove the boy to therapy sessions in Boston, got him high for the first time, and found the teenager a summer job, the St. George’s student alleged in an interview with the Globe.

“I felt like a really special person,” Marshall said.

This video interview with sexual abuse survivor “Marshall” contains content that some viewers may find disturbing. Viewer discretion is advised.

On one occasion, Lydgate invited the boy to Block Island, where they slept in separate twin beds in the same room. In the morning, Lydgate allegedly walked over to the 15-year-old’s bed, pulled down Marshall’s underwear, and said: “OK, let’s see what you got.”

Lydgate performed oral sex on him, Marshall said, and guided the boy’s hand onto Lydgate’s penis. “I was just shocked,” Marshall recalled.

Marshall’s accusations appear anonymously in an [investigative report released in December](#) by St. George’s.

The teenager shared what had happened with his school-referred psychiatrist. The doctor, who has since died, told him it was rape, Marshall recalled. It’s unclear whether the psychiatrist informed school officials.

Lydgate apparently left St. George’s in the middle of the year. Reached by phone in Hawaii, he would not answer questions about the terms of his departure, and he denied Marshall’s accusations. “I have no recollection of any such incident,” he said.

St. George’s declined to comment on the allegations because of ongoing investigations by an independent attorney and by the police.

After the alleged assault, Marshall struggled with drugs and was kicked out of St. George’s for a semester. For decades, he told no one else what had happened, and he battled alcoholism and depression.

Lydgate, meanwhile, went on to other teaching jobs. In January 2001, he was hired as an English teacher at Island School in Kauai. The small school welcomed the gregarious, Yale-educated teacher, who asked people to call him by his middle name, Tony.

Lydgate paid some of his male students — often those from single-parent homes or low-income families — to do odd jobs at his house, according to interviews with several students who worked at his home and school officials Peggy Ellenburg and Adrya Siebring. At least four students later confided to school officials that he made sexual advances to them. One fled the teacher's home after Lydgate suggested they “explore the physical aspect” of their relationship, according to an interview with that student, whose accusations were recounted in the 2008 lawsuit filed by another alleged victim.

Lydgate told school officials he had done nothing wrong, and he reiterated that denial in an interview with the Globe.

“Obviously, if there had been any misconduct given the situation in the world today, I and everyone else involved would be in jail,” Lydgate said.

Even after Lydgate resigned in the spring of 2003 — at Island School's request, a school official said — he allegedly kept pursuing several teenage boys, getting one 16-year-old drunk and engaging in oral sex, according to the [2008 lawsuit](#).

Lydgate, in court records, acknowledged sexual encounters with the boy but described the relationship as consensual. Lydgate even recorded a phone conversation with the teenager to confirm that he “was not coerced to participate in sex acts with him” and “participated of his own free will,” according to court documents.

Lydgate and the school countersued the student, and they eventually reached a confidential settlement.

Siebring, dean of students at Island School, said she wasn't surprised to learn that another student had accused Lydgate of sexual assault decades ago.

"I've never understood why that man's not in jail," Siebring said.

Last year, a new parent at Island School told Siebring about a great visit she had to a local chocolate farm called Steelgrass Farm, where she met a smart, engaging man named Tony Lydgate.

She said he offered to mentor her teenage son on the chocolate farm, Siebring recalled. Lydgate declined to comment on the encounter.

Siebring said she quickly filled the parent in on what had happened at Island School and offered three words of advice: Call the police.



St. George's School in Middletown, R.I. DINA RUDICK/GLOBE STAFF

“I would certainly file that report today.”

Eight days after the Globe’s first story in December on abuse cases at St. George’s School, the school released a report to alumni on the history of sexual misconduct there. Signed by headmaster Eric Peterson and board chair Leslie Heaney, the report cited 26 alumni who had told an investigator they had been abused by one of six “employee perpetrators.” The most recent case cited was from 1988.

Not mentioned were a series of more recent abuse allegations that came during the tenure of the current school administration, an omission whose consequences are still ricocheting among three schools.

The Boston Globe attempted to survey more than 200 private schools in New England about allegations of sexual abuse. Most declined our request for information. If there are incidents of abuse that you think should be reviewed by the Spotlight team, you can [submit that information here](#) or email Spotlight@Globe.com.

St. George's had received complaints about athletic trainer, technology officer, and then-dorm parent Charles Thompson by 2003, when one teenage boy told his family that Thompson had touched, harassed, and stalked him. The school placed Thompson on leave the next year after 10 more boys told school officials that he had touched them inappropriately or made them uncomfortable. One former student said to the Globe that Thompson invited him into his room at night, supposedly for physical therapy sessions, as "an excuse to try to stick his hands under my shorts."

But Peterson, who became headmaster in 2004, concluded on the advice of a lawyer that the allegations didn't amount to sexual abuse or need to be reported to authorities, and Thompson was allowed to return to teaching. He moved on in 2011 to become director of information technology at the Taft School in Connecticut — and the allegations were omitted from St. George's 2015 public report on abuse allegations at the school.

That was hardly the end of the story, however.

In the wake of media coverage of abuse allegations at St. George's, the Thompson case and others are being investigated by Rhode Island State Police. And St. George's officials are awaiting the findings of a second investigation of sexual abuse after criticism of the first review's independence.

Officials at Taft, where Thompson now works, placed him on leave in January while

they conduct their own investigation. They also criticized St. George's for not disclosing the earlier accusations; Thompson came with "highly favorable references," a Taft spokeswoman said.

"All these stories, they're the tip of the iceberg of a history of abuse, of privilege, of secrecy, of broken lives." Steven Starr

Tim Richards, who in 2004 had interviewed the boys in Thompson's dorm as St. George's dean of students, apologized for not having reported Thompson to authorities himself. "I should have known," wrote Richards in a Jan. 24 e-mail to the community at Pomfret School in Connecticut, where he is now head of school. "I would certainly file that report today, and would expect the same from all Pomfret employees."

One week later, Richards [apologized again](#), this time for not acting promptly to investigate an allegation at his own school. In 2015, an alumnus had written to say he was molested in the early 1970s by then-Pomfret chaplain and dorm master John Edmonds. Richards took no action until the Thompson story became news.

"It's odd to me that Tim Richards didn't do anything with my letter of almost a year ago until the St. George's thing broke," said the former student, who asked not to be identified.

Richards informed child welfare officials and apologized to the alumnus directly. "I want you to know how terribly sorry I am that you were the victim of inappropriate conduct on the part of a former employee of Pomfret," Richards wrote.

Edmonds, now retired and living in Maine, said in a phone interview that he did not remember initiating sexual contact with students, but acknowledged that on several

occasions “kids embraced me,” including “kissing.” He declined to provide further details.

Edmonds said he recently wrote a letter to the head of school to say he was sorry if he offended anybody.

“If I did something that somebody inferred was inappropriate, I’m sorry about that,” Edmonds told the Globe. “I don’t remember an occasion, but if that happened and somebody is offended and there is a problem, I apologize for that.”

Through a spokeswoman, Richards said: “In hindsight, this particular matter likely should have been reported 10 months earlier than it was.” Pomfret, too, has hired an independent investigator.

More than 200 students have been victims of sexual abuse and harassment at New England private schools since the 1950’s. At least 90 students or their families have filed lawsuits or other legal claims related to sexual abuse at New England private schools. At least 67 private schools in New England have been affected by allegations of sexual abuse by employees disclosed over the past 25 years.

The question of when and what to report is not always straightforward. Educators and individuals such as health care professionals are required to report suspected child abuse to state welfare officials under mandated reporting laws, but even state agencies can differ on what that means in practice. In Rhode Island, the attorney general’s office told the Globe that schools must report every allegation of sexual or physical child abuse, including by school employees, to the state’s Department of Children, Youth and Families within 24 hours. But the child welfare agency said the law generally only requires schools to report abuse by parents and guardians, not by

teachers.

Some are pushing efforts nationally, including in Massachusetts, to prevent schools from allowing problem teachers to move from institution to institution.

“The laws that we have are so woefully insufficient,” said Eric MacLeish, an attorney who represented hundreds of clergy abuse victims and now represents more than 30 alleged victims of St. George’s. “If there is a stick of dynamite in the form of a predatory child molester and that person gets thrown into another school, or another parish, it should be a crime.”

St. George’s officials stand by their decision not to report the Thompson episodes to authorities or to include them in the 2015 report. School spokesman Joseph Baerlein has said that the school felt the alleged incidents did not rise to the level of abuse.

To survivors, that rings hollow. Many are calling for the headmaster’s resignation.

“Eric Peterson has been covering this up since 2004,” said Harry Groome of Arlington, who says he was raped by an upperclassman in 1979. Groome says he told Peterson about the rape three times but got no response until the report was issued last year.

Baerlein said in April that the board of trustees is standing by Peterson.



The campus of Deerfield Academy in Deerfield, Mass. DINA RUDICK/GLOBE STAFF

“The running tally of what we know”

David Stettler hadn't even started his job as Fessenden's new headmaster in April 2011 when he cracked open a dark chapter in the school's history, one that his predecessor, Coffin, had confidently denied in 1977.

Faced with a legal demand from a man who said he was abused by Clarridge at the school in the 1970s, Stettler agreed to begin an investigation.

He learned that Fessenden had received another complaint in 2008 and had settled three claims in the 1990s, including one by the former student who told the Globe he was abused by four people at the school.

“The school leadership has come to the realization that this intolerable behavior in past decades may have been broader in scope than we once had reason to believe,” Stettler wrote to the school community in October 2011.

Stettler felt he had set an example for how schools should confront past sexual abuse. But some recipients of his letter were startled and angry.

Sweeney, the alleged Clarridge victim from Newton, was furious that Stettler wrote — in an echo of Coffin — that at the time of the 1977 arrests, “there was no indication that Fessenden boys were abused or that any misconduct occurred on the School’s campus.”

Today, Stettler says he has no doubt that Sweeney had indeed complained years before the arrests to Coffin, who died in 1981. Unfortunately, Stettler said, he didn’t know that when he wrote the letter, because hardly anyone from that period still worked at the school.

Even if Stettler’s letter was incomplete, it did have considerable effect: Twelve more former students, including Starr, Sweeney, and Hooper, contacted Fessenden to say they had also been abused. They named a total of five staffers.

Stettler said that deciding when to update the Fessenden community was challenging, in part because some alleged victims spoke to him in confidence, and partly because the number of allegations kept changing.

“Let’s accept for the moment that a follow-up letter would be appropriate,” he said. “When? Should it have been an annual letter? ‘Here’s the running tally of what we know’? . . . Maybe there should have been.”

In the letter he did send to the community last Thursday, Stettler said the school had taken note of alumni criticism of Fessenden's leadership in the 1960s and 1970s and had recently removed Coffin's name from the ice rink.

David Wolowitz, a New Hampshire lawyer who has represented private schools facing sexual abuse allegations, said it's understandable that alleged victims want the fullest possible disclosure — and also that schools want to proceed with caution.

Officials often have no evidence to corroborate abuse alleged to have happened years earlier, and merely naming someone as an alleged abuser can destroy a reputation.

“Once the accused's name is published, the damage to that individual, to their career, to their livelihood, to their personal reputation, maybe to their family, is done,” Wolowitz said.



Amen Hall on the campus of Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, N.H. DINA RUDICK/GLOBE STAFF

“Part of a healing process”

In April, Lawrence Jenkins called up the man he says molested him 43 years ago at Phillips Exeter Academy.

“Do you remember me?” Jenkins recalled saying as the conversation was secretly recorded by police in Greensboro, N.C., where he lives. “I stayed one night with you. I stayed there and you fondled me.”

Police declined to share the transcript of Jenkins’s conversation with former Exeter admissions officer Arthur Peekel, but Jenkins remembered it vividly.

“Maybe one of us was dreaming,” Peekel then said, according to Jenkins and his wife,

who was also listening to the call.

“I’m sure I wasn’t dreaming.”

“Maybe I was dreaming,” Peekel responded.

Jenkins had been on an overnight campus visit in that fall of 1973, checking out the New Hampshire prep school. Peekel told the 14-year-old he had to sleep in his bedroom. There was a small cot set up next to Peekel’s bed, so close that the edges almost touched. Then the lights went out. Peekel allegedly reached under the covers and fondled the boy; he then used the teenager’s hand to stimulate himself.

The boy immediately confided in his mother about the alleged assault, and his uncle met with school leaders the next day.

Peekel told the Globe that school officials confronted him with the accusations several days later and he denied that anything had happened. He took a leave of absence in December 1973 and resigned the following year, according to Exeter officials. Peekel said in an interview that he left to take care of his sick mother in Illinois.

Jenkins, a college professor, [shared his story on Facebook](#) in March, one day after seeing some of his Exeter classmates speak out this year about teacher Rick Schubart’s sexual misconduct. With some online sleuthing, Jenkins found that the man he says touched him that night had gone on to an illustrious career in education elsewhere. In 1991, Peekel was honored as the Illinois Teacher of the Year.

But by leaving New Hampshire for another state, Peekel also opened himself up to prosecution — the statute of limitations was suspended when he crossed the border.

That's what led the Exeter and Greensboro police to get involved, and what drew Jenkins to a small windowless conference room, accompanied by his wife and a police detective, where Jenkins talked to Peekel on the phone. The detective from time to time passed notes across the gray table about what to ask.

"It's important to me as I'm looking for closure that you say you're sorry for what happened," Jenkins said.

"Absolutely, I'm sorry. I wish I could make it up to you," Peekel replied, according to Jenkins's and his wife's recollection.

"Thank you for saying you're sorry," Jenkins said.

Jenkins was shaking as he hung up the phone. He felt he was either about to vomit or burst into tears.

"He needs to have a public accounting for what he did," Jenkins said.

Peekel, however, told the Globe that he apologized to Jenkins but not for any wrongdoing.

"I invited him and another student to stay with me. . . . I'm just sorry that I put him and another boy in a situation where they could have imagined something happened," Peekel said.

The events of that night long ago at Exeter left an indelible mark on Jenkins's life. "I couldn't bear to be touched by other people, and it took me a decade to be able to be intimate with another human being. It has taken the better part of a lifetime to rebuild what was taken away so casually," he wrote to classmates in Exeter's class of 1977

Facebook group.

Jenkins has in recent weeks received messages of support from dozens of classmates, including the woman who first alerted the Globe about Schubart's sexual misconduct.

"For me, it's part of a healing process that I wasn't aware I hadn't finished," Jenkins said.

The network of alumni providing support to each other, like the group SGS for Healing, which has formed to advocate for St. George's alumni, has been key for many abuse survivors. Some, in the last few months, have told their families or gone to therapy for the first time. The group effort has also been important in pressuring the schools to take responsibility for past events that, for former students, have had lifelong implications.

"It never occurred to me that there would be a group of survivors of sexual abuse or that I would put myself in that place," said Marshall, the St. George's student who was allegedly molested by the teacher Lydgate. "I want to stay in touch with others, and I also want to reinforce the public understanding that sexual abuse is not about the particular incident of sexual abuse. It's about what happens to people's lives."

For all the investigations, some survivors feel there still needs to be a more comprehensive look at how independent schools operate.

"I wish there would be a deeper conversation about behavior, about culture, about signs of someone who is being abused and how to respond to that," said Anne Scott, the St. George's alumna. "There's an important opportunity for independent schools right now. It is not about protecting the image. It's about using this as an opportunity to transform how we talk about and deal upfront with something that all these years

we've buried.”

The Boston Area Rape Crisis Center provides support and resources around the clock at 1-800-841-8371 and www.barcc.org .

Lisa Tuite of the Globe staff contributed to this report.

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