

NIGHTLINE

STORY SLUG:NIGHTLINE

PRODUCER: ABC NEWS

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INTERVIEWEES:

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DRATCH, ADMIRAL TIM KEATING, PAT
KEHOE, MICHAEL LESHER, AMY
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RESIDENT, NEW YORK RESIDENT,
REPRESENTATIVE TOM TANCREDO, JAKE
TAPPER, MARK WEISS

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[CONTENT: RABBI AVROHOM MONDROWITZ, SEXUAL ABUSE, MARK WEISS, DETECTIVE PAT KEHOE, RABBI MARK DRATCH]

[1]23:40:56

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(OC) And now, to another New York Story. But this one has been brewing for more than 20 years. It takes place across the East River from here in Brooklyn, inside the tight-knit, orthodox Jewish community, where some are trying to break what they see is a code of silence when it comes to pedophilia. Tonight, new light is being shed on an old case of alleged child sexual abuse in a new installment of our series, "Faith Matters."

[GRAPHICS: FAITH MATTERS]

[1]23:41:23

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(OC) And how far down the street did you make it that night?

[1]23:41:25

PAT KEHOE (RETIRED NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT DETECTIVE)

We made it all the way down.

[1]23:41:28

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(VO) And by the time Detective Pat Kehoe made it to the end of that street, she says she was certain the disturbing anonymous call she'd received earlier that evening was true.

[1]23:41:38

PAT KEHOE (RETIRED NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT DETECTIVE)

I never had received a call like that in my whole career in the New York City Police Department. Never. There was a rabbi and gave the name and he was abusing people on this block. And he said if you go knocking on doors, you'll find victims.

[1]23:41:55

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(VO) So, 22 years ago, that's just what she and her partner did. Came to this street and knocked on doors. Was there a pedophile lurking here in what was then largely an Italian community? A man who called himself Rabbi Avrohom Mondrowitz.

[1]23:42:10

PAT KEHOE (RETIRED NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT DETECTIVE)

The parents really thought he was a great guy. He did a lot of things with their children. The children all liked him.

[1]23:42:16

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(VO) Or so they thought. It didn't take long to hear something very different from several of the Italian children living on this street. Kehoe says the Rabbi won their trust with gifts like bicycles.

[1]23:42:29

PAT KEHOE (RETIRED NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT DETECTIVE)

As the questions became more difficult for the children, did anything ever happen? Did anything sexual ever happen? Are you aware of it happening to anyone else when you were there? They all broke down and cried. Each one separately.

[1]23:42:44

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(OC) And specifically, what did the kids say the rabbi had done to them?

- [1]23:42:48 **PAT KEHOE (RETIRED NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT DETECTIVE)**
That he had fondled them. He had had sexual relations with them. He had fondled others in their presence.
- [1]23:43:00 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(OC) All boys?
- [1]23:43:01 **PAT KEHOE (RETIRED NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT DETECTIVE)**
All boys.
- [1]23:43:02 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(OC) And one after the other, they cried?
- [1]23:43:05 **PAT KEHOE (RETIRED NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT DETECTIVE)**
Cried.
- [1]23:43:07 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(VO) Four of the children, all Italian, aged 11 to 16, agreed to give statements to the police, which became the basis for an indictment against Rabbi Mondrowitz on charges ranging from sexual abuse to sodomy. But Detective Kehoe was convinced it wasn't just neighborhood kids who were being abused.
- [1]23:43:26 **PAT KEHOE (RETIRED NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT DETECTIVE)**
What we were advised was that in this house, he had an office that he used downstairs. And he was seeing people.
- [1]23:43:36 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(OC) Children?
- [1]23:43:36 **PAT KEHOE (RETIRED NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT DETECTIVE)**
Children of the Hasidic community and trying to help them.
- [1]23:43:41 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(VO) The self-proclaimed rabbi, we now know he was never formally credentialed, kept his files here at his home. But by the time the Detective Kehoe got here, he and his family had already fled.
- [1]23:43:54 **PAT KEHOE (RETIRED NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT DETECTIVE)**
We've seized all the records and we contacted a lot of people. But unfortunately a lot of the people wouldn't speak to us.
- [1]23:44:02 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(OC) In fact, would any of them speak to you?
- [1]23:44:04 **PAT KEHOE (RETIRED NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT DETECTIVE)**
No. None of them would speak to us.
- [1]23:44:07 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(VO) Not one orthodox Jewish boy would be interviewed. Nor would any of their parents.
- [1]23:44:12 **MARK DRATCH (RABBI)**
A person might be ostracized or there may be consequences to the individual and his standing within the community.

- [1]23:44:17 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(OC) We've been told of cases where, literally, families were driven from the community.
- [1]23:44:21 **MARK DRATCH (RABBI)**
That is correct. That is correct.
- [1]23:44:25 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(VO) Rabbi Mark Dratch says while there is an important historical reason for this, he is concerned with the result.
- [1]23:44:33 **MARK DRATCH (RABBI)**
Jews have not been protected in most of the countries in which we lived through most of our history. And such a report a fellow Jew to the civil authorities was very, very dangerous.
- [1]23:44:44 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(VO) There's a word for this?
- [1]23:44:45 **MARK DRATCH (RABBI)**
It's called mesira. And that's the prohibition, a prohibition on the books of reporting fellow Jews to the authorities under any circumstances.
- [1]23:44:54 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(VO) In fact, the edict is so strong that an orthodox newspaper in the wake of a sexual abuse case six years ago, published this mandate, signed by 50 prominent rabbis, reminding the community that if a Jew reports another Jew to the police, quote, "Whoever has the first opportunity to kill him, he's entitled to do so."
- [1]23:45:15 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(OC) Isn't that a perversion of the religious value?
- [1]23:45:17 **MARK DRATCH (RABBI)**
I think it's a terrible perversion of the religious value. And I think it's a misunderstanding, a misapplication.
- [1]23:45:23 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(VO) There is, perhaps, no one who feels that more strongly than Mark Weiss. Orthodox Jew, husband and father of three. He has asked us to blur his children's faces because he's coming forward to say publicly that when he was a boy of 13, he was sent to Rabbi Mondrowitz for counseling and was molested.
- [1]23:45:44 **MARK WEISS (VICTIM)**
He had kind of a sporty, little car. And he had this really cool sound system in there. And right off the bat, I remember, you know, just being completely overwhelmed with just, like, how cool this guy is. You know?
- [1]23:45:57 **CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)**
(VO) An immature and unworldly kid, had finally, he thought, found an adult who understood him.
- [1]23:46:03 **MARK WEISS (VICTIM)**
When he offered sleeping in the room with him, I really didn't think twice about it.

[1]23:46:08

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(OC) You didn't?

[1]23:46:09

MARK WEISS (VICTIM)

I did not. He essentially, sort of, worked me through all - you know, put your hand here. Touch this. What have you.

[1]23:46:17

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(VO) According to Mark, the touching led to sodomy on multiple occasions throughout the week he spent with Mondrowitz. But Mark Weiss says at 13 he couldn't make sense of the experience and buried in his memory. Until five years later, when at 18, he was home for the holidays attending services.

[1]23:46:37

MARK WEISS (VICTIM)

I look across the room and across the room I see Rabbi Mondrowitz. And it just hit me like a ton of bricks what had happened. And I froze.

[1]23:46:47

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(OC) What did you realize?

[1]23:46:49

MARK WEISS (VICTIM)

I realized that I was sexually molested when I was 13 years old. That's what I realized.

[1]23:46:55

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(VO) He told his mother. He told his father. But no one ever told the police.

[1]23:47:02

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(OC) So, what happened to the rabbi, who Mark Weiss says abused him? We find him when we come back.

[1]23:47:09

ANNOUNCER

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[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

[1]23:50:13

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(VO) On a windy day this fall, we met with Rabbi Herbert Bomzer, president of the Rabbinical Board in Flatbush, Brooklyn.

[1]23:50:21

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(OC) You know why I wanna talk to you, which is about a very sensitive subject in any community. And that is about child abuse, pedophilia. Does pedophilia exist in the Orthodox community?

[1]23:50:33

RABBI HERBERT BOMZER (PRESIDENT)

I have no personal experience in over 50 years as a rabbi in my community of any accusations, indictments about pedophilia.

[1]23:50:47

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(OC) Is it a possibility, in your mind, that the reason you have no knowledge is because people are frightened? They're too frightened to come forward?

[1]23:50:54

RABBI HERBERT BOMZER (PRESIDENT)

Yes. On the other hand, there's no knowledge. They have not come forward.

[1]23:51:00

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(VO) One reason may be articles like the one we mentioned earlier, which threatens death to Jews who talk. I showed Rabbi Bomzer that article.

[1]23:51:08

RABBI HERBERT BOMZER (PRESIDENT)

It's a very, very sensitive issue. Most there, indeed, call into my maladies, subject to death punishment, execution.

[1]23:51:20

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(OC) But surely that doesn't apply in a case where someone's being accused of child abuse, does it?

[1]23:51:27

RABBI HERBERT BOMZER (PRESIDENT)

It depends who the person is, the person himself who is reporting this. The victim, let's say. And it would not apply. That is correct. And he has a right to go to the authorities. My feeling would be he should go first to the Jewish authorities and the Jewish should try to handle it internally.

[1]23:51:49

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(VO) Many victims insist that handling matters internally really means that allegations are just not made public and law enforcement is not informed. That's just what happened in Mark Weiss's case. And even though Mark Weiss and five other Orthodox men now say they were molested by Rabbi Mondrowitz, he has never stood trial on any charge, and now lives with his family in Israel. A bitter pill for those who claim he abused them.

[1]23:52:20

MICHAEL LESHER (LAWYER)

They are seething. Still seething with what was done to them. And as one of them put it to me every day that Avrohom Mondrowitz can live openly in Israel, knowing that he is safe from prosecution because nobody cares is another day that they are victimized all over again.

[1]23:52:35

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(VO) Michael Lesher represents all six men.

[1]23:52:38

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(OC) Some members of the Orthodox community say this is a very old case and very old charges with very deep wounds, and that it would be better to just let it go now.

[1]23:52:51

MICHAEL LESHER (LAWYER)

Well, that's not what my clients believe. And they're the victims carrying the wounds. That's not what I believe. And I belong to the community they do.

[1]23:52:59

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(VO) So, since that old indictment from 22 years ago still exists, why isn't the Brooklyn district attorney trying to get Mondrowitz extradited to the US? We wanted to ask the District Attorney Charles Hines himself, but his office refused our interview request. So this fall, we set out to find 58-year-old Avrohom Mondrowitz ourselves, and easily located him in Jerusalem, where he lectures at a local college. We asked him for an interview, but he declined.

[1]23:53:31

AMY NEUSTEIN (SOCIOLOGIST)

The community has been harmed by this conspiracy of silence.

[1]23:53:35

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(VO) Sociologist Amy Neustein had been working with Michael Lesher for years, trying to document a system in which she says some rabbis often push abuse out of sight.

[1]23:53:45

AMY NEUSTEIN (SOCIOLOGIST)

The way they take care of it is by threatening the victims, silencing the victim, and telling the victim to just keep quiet.

[1]23:53:53

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(OC) So if you're a sexual pedophile, the Orthodox community is a good place to operate?

[1]23:53:58

MICHAEL LESHER (LAWYER)

I would have to say it's an extremely good place to operate.

[1]23:54:01

AMY NEUSTEIN (SOCIOLOGIST)

How deeply rooted is pedophilia and child exploitation in this community? We're just at the tip of the iceberg.

[1]23:54:08

MARK WEISS (VICTIM)

Nobody's gonna look down upon the Orthodox Jewish community negatively because we're talking about this. They're going to come to admire us for being straight about it and admitting we have a problem and we're gonna solve it.

[1]23:54:24

CYNTHIA MCFADDEN (ABC NEWS)

(OC) And the man Mark Weiss and now five other Orthodox men and four Italian boys all accuse of abusing them remains at large in Israel. We will keep you posted. And when we come back, why are members of Congress sticking up for a bounty hunter? It's a dogfight and the "Sign Of The Times."

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]