

## **Transcript: Breaking the silence of sexual abuse – Ann's story**

### **⚠ Content Warning**

**This transcript contains detailed descriptions of:**

- **Sexual abuse**
- **Rape**
- **Spiritual abuse and coercion**
- **Abortion under duress**
- **Trauma-related impacts (shame, guilt, hypervigilance)**
- **Suicidal thoughts**

**Some sections are particularly graphic. Section-specific warnings are provided in-line. Please take care while reading and seek support if needed. Details of support are available at <https://gloucester.anglican.org/about-us/safeguarding/survivors/>**

Ann: If my story enables even just one person, of any gender, to consider moving out of that dark place they are in, I shall feel it worth my painful journey to arrive here and share in this video.

**[Intro caption: "Anne shares her story of sexual abuse, spiritual abuse, coercion, and abortion."]**

Ann: I am now, at long last, able to talk about my terrible experiences.

Brett: Thank you so much for inviting this conversation. We have been in touch for about seven or eight months now, since you first wrote to Bishop Rachel, and

that really started the journey that you have been on in contact with my team—the safeguarding team in the Diocese of Gloucester. Where we have got to today is an opportunity for us to have a conversation together, and for other people to hear a bit about who you are, your experiences, and the journey you have been on. I know you have expressed a hope that in coming forward and sharing some of this, it may enable others to feel they can come forward.

Ann: I do hope so, yes.

Brett: I would like to take us back to the beginning to find out a bit about where you were born and grew up. You could start by telling us about that.

Ann: I was born in Hereford in 1944, and my father was appointed chaplain of Felsted School in Essex. This was an idyllic time for me. I had many friends, my own bedroom, and we had a huge garden where I made several dens, learnt to ride a bike, and was introduced to gardening. Life was good, fun, an adventure.

As a young child I attended Sunday school, and when older I attended the Felsted school services. This suited me, as my mother and I sat in raised pews, enabling me to watch everything. I was so proud of my father in his robes taking the services.

At the age of 11—still quite young—my parents left for Uganda. My father was appointed principal of a teaching college, and I was to see them just once a year. This was a very hard time for me. I felt abandoned and hated the Church of England boarding school that I was in.

We had services morning and evening, grace in Latin before and after meals. The only positive, I think, was that I was in the choir and good at games. Every minute was accounted for—controlled. Looking back, I think I was already being programmed by the Church.

On my parents' return to the UK, my father became vicar in a Hereford parish. I would help to prepare services for him.

Brett: Thank you for telling me. That is quite a snapshot of your childhood—those strong connections to the church, but also that sense of resentment and abandonment, alongside those lovely memories. Thank you for sharing both sides of that.

So we will move forward a bit to when you were older. Do you remember when you first met RH, and how old you might have been at that time?

Ann: Yes, very much. I first met RH when I was 22, when I first attended the church in Gloucester. RH led me to believe that, as a new member of the church, I should expect a visit.

As the daughter of a Church of England priest, I recognised this as usual practice. His initial visit was organised for coffee and a chat. My flat was a two-minute walk from the church.

**[CW: Graphic sexual assault details]**

Ann: His second visit, uninvited—to my horror—he exposed himself and forced me to handle him, stating, “I knew you would understand.” I was young and in total shock. I could not believe or process what had occurred. I was frightened.

When he visited again, he pushed his way into the hall. He told me to kneel down on the carpet and face away from him, which I thought was odd, but I presumed, being on one’s knees, we were to pray.

I was totally unprepared for his action. He tore off my underwear and forcefully anally raped me. The pain was terrible. He ordered me to remain kneeling and not look at him. I could hear him adjusting himself. He then just left me—torn physically, emotionally, and bloody.

I have had to have two haemorrhoid operations and for years have suffered from the same. His behaviour continued over some time, always visiting me after the 10 o’clock communion service. Sometimes he would force me into the corner of

my flat and make me watch him masturbate and ejaculate into my hands, arranged as if I was receiving communion.

Sometimes he would ejaculate into the linen used for covering the chalice and wafers. At least at those times I was not anally raped and hurt. Then I would be expected to wash the linen. I knew how to iron and fold it correctly, as I sometimes helped my mother at the vicarage and she taught me to respect this holy cloth.

His abuse continued even when I was menstruating, and he would ignore my plea to stop. The day arrived when he locked the door, threw me on the bed, and vaginally raped me. I was still a virgin—innocent—and I felt relief that this time it was not so painful.

### **[CW: Abortion under duress]**

Ann: Later I learnt that I was pregnant. The following days were full of fear and lies. At the time I was working for the Church of England adoption agency, helping young women at their time of difficulty.

It was Easter when I learnt that I was pregnant. I was staying with my parents and helping them once again to prepare the services for Good Friday and Easter Day. I cannot think how I managed to cope with that weekend.

Returning to work after the holidays, I was so sick with anxiety I would throw up in the cathedral car park behind my parked car, hoping that no one had witnessed me.

RH commanded me to have an abortion. In those days it was not lawful other than for rape. I started to learn how to lie. I lied to the GP, saying I did not know the rapist—that he was a total stranger. That was the only way I could move forward with an abortion. I lied to my colleagues and my boss in order to have sick leave. I lied to my friends and relatives about the nature of the operation.

The hospital experience was terrible. On entering the ward there was a book that patients had to sign, writing down the reason for their operation. It was there for anyone to view. On awakening from the operation, I found leaflets on my bedside table: "Make sure your baby next time is a wanted one." I was told I was a careless, bad woman.

RH collected me in my own car, and I drove home. Immediately he began fondling my breasts and running his hand up my skirt. This was the day after the abortion. Even when I left Gloucester he attempted to find me. The abortion took place on my sister's birthday, and ever since then I have tried to be bright at parties.

**[CW: Ongoing trauma; suicidal ideation occurs later]**

Ann: How was I left feeling at the time of the abuse? Physically torn, utterly bereft, bewildered, shocked at his satanic behaviour. I could not fight nor flee—I just froze. Looking back, how did he have such power, such control over me? I certainly questioned this and continue to question it.

I could not believe how he had misused his role within the Church to do this to me. Was I easy prey, because he knew my Church background? I remained so confused because of the pregnancy and having to make arrangements. A lot of how I felt about the abuse had to be pushed to the back of my mind. I had to hide my emotions. I had to restart my life, living a life of lies, guilt, and despair.

My relationship with the Church of England altered dramatically, and I had to continue pretending to my parents that I still believed.

Brett: Thank you. It is very powerful hearing this. It is important to know that power sits with you. It might not feel like it, but this is you sharing your experiences, and you hold the power here in the sense that no one is making you share it, and you get to choose what happens with this. That feels really important—that this is for you.

It sounds like there has been that sense of blame and shame—misplaced on yourself—rather than on RH who was responsible. As if you were somehow responsible for the awful things that happened to you.

Ann: I think all victims think that.

Brett: How long was it before you first felt able to share anything with anybody about what had happened to you?

Ann: I question that constantly. I do not know why I never talked to anyone nor reported him. I now wish that I had, but at the time I was ashamed and, like most victims, presumed it was my fault—the power of guilt. I could not and never did confide in my parents, and they died in peaceful ignorance. I knew that he was well-liked, respected, and secure in his role, and that it would be my word against his. I valued my job, which I would have had to leave.

So what of the future? I learnt to live a life of lies, secrecy, pretence, sadness, and utter despair. The darkness and dirt inside me haunted me and followed me like a shadow for all these years, and I expect it will until my death. He caused me to move from place to place and be with people who did not know me. My home—everyone's home—should be a safe place. I am continually checking my door is locked and remain hypervigilant all the time.

I should have married when I was 30, but my fiancé eventually left me, as he was unable to live with what had happened to me and the possibility that I could not have children. At 47 I married a widower, but he began sexually abusing me and expected me to return abuse for his gratification. Knowing my background, he thought it was his given right—that I “deserved” it. I met my second husband and we thought we could make that relationship work, but we divorced after five years. He has remained in contact and is trying to support me, but the abuse I suffered has severely affected our relationship.

**[CW: Suicidal ideation]**

Prior to meeting him, I attempted suicide once, and those thoughts are never far away.

I eventually met with the Devon Police, who believed me, were kind and understanding, and advised me to contact the Gloucester Police. I never did. I was offered some counselling, which did not help. A course of EMDR did help for some years, but I was allotted the NHS six weeks, so we never covered my abortion.

Brett: Thank you for sharing all that you have shared so far. Could you say something about how you feel the abuse you suffered has impacted how you relate to others over your lifetime?

Ann: When friends—including my sister—had their babies, I had to pretend that I had not destroyed one, and be happy and pleased for other people with parenthood.

Brett: Does that feel like having to put a mask on?

Ann: Yes, absolutely. This kind of acceptable face of “everything is fine”, even though it is not. Yes. Even though it has been so many years, it is still difficult.

Brett: It sounds like there are two things there: one is about people who do not want to know—who may be dismissive, as you have mentioned. The other is the feeling that people probably do not want to know—that it is too much for them, and it is better to say “everything is fine”. That must be really hard.

Ann: It almost becomes normal—but not quite. No, I think I am wrong on that. It is still very much a learning process.

Brett: And the care you have for others has led you, over your lifetime, to protect others from the truth?

Ann: Yes. When actually the one person who really needed protecting was me, and that did not happen—it could not happen.

Brett: I know that “victim” is how you have identified yourself, rather than “survivor”. That is an important part of your story. When you met with me and Bishop Rachel, you were believed and taken seriously, and we care about the

contact and the support in place—because you are of value and worth. I know it is hard to take that in.

I also know that some of the support you have been having more recently—holistic therapies, massage, and acupuncture—has been part of the beginning of that journey for you: prioritising your wellbeing and doing something that takes care of you.

Ann: I am so unused to it. I hear what you are saying and I acknowledge it, but it is difficult to accept. I have not felt worthy enough to look after myself until quite recently. Having holistic treatment, I am beginning to think, yes, perhaps I am a bit worthy too.

Brett: Physical touch has been a really important part of that, because you have spoken about what physical touch can be like for you, and also your experience of pain in your body, and how—because of living with PTSD—that can take you back to physically painful experiences.

Ann: Very much so. For me, physical pain often takes me straight back into that flat.

Brett: How has it been for you more recently, in sharing your story?

Ann: Having made contact in August 2024 and receiving a letter back from Bishop Rachel expressing her deep shock and belief in my sexual abuse, I felt enabled to share my story. It was a difficult meeting for all of us, but I had prepared my victim statement, and this helped me to be unemotional.

Brett and I began emailing and then had weekly telephone calls. These have helped me enormously, and have been better than counselling. We met a second time, which was much easier. I have come to view Brett as professional but also as a friend. I feel that he, although paid by the Church of England, is on my side, supporting me—a difficult role, I think.

I would urge anyone requiring help to contact their local safeguarding. This helped me a lot and brought me to a place of strength. I am now, at long last, able to talk about my terrible experiences, and think seriously about coming forward and speaking out.

If my story enables even just one person, of any gender, to consider moving out of that dark place they are in, I shall feel it worth my painful journey to arrive here and share. There must be many others who remain silent—guilt and shame holding one back. That is what our abusers want. We must try to stop this abuse by breaking our silence.

I have got to the stage of sharing—of opening up after all this time—and it seems a strange place, an unknown place to be in. Yes, and yet I am glad I have done this. It had to be done.

Brett: What you have described across your lifetime is not “the abuse ended and then everything was fine”. It has been the sense of the abuse continuing—living with you in a very real sense.

Ann: It has been a hard journey, but I think I am gaining some strength. I could not ever use the word “power”, but some strength to face what I have been through—in the hope that it could help other victims realise that, in the end, it is easier to speak out than to live a silent, quiet life of despair. I would hate for other people to wait as long as I have—until as old as I am—to seek help. Much earlier would be better.

Brett: Thank you. I think that is a powerful place to end. If we are thinking about how hearing what you have shared might empower or enable others out there to come forwards, it is to hear that it is difficult, and that your goal is to reach out to other victims—particularly from the Church of England, but really to all victims.

Ann: Yes. That was my first letter to Bishop Rachel—trying to help, to reach out to other victims, particularly from the Church of England, but we should be looking for all victims.

Brett: And I am really pleased for you that there has been a shift in you feeling able to seek some support for yourself through holistic therapies, because it sounds like that is a significant and recent development for you in your journey as a victim.

Ann: It has transformed my journey.

Brett: Thank you.

Ann: Thank you.

**Get support:** If you have been affected by any of the issues that Ann shares and would like to speak to a member of our Safeguarding Team please get in touch.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Team may be contacted using these details:

01452 835516 (Mon-Fri, 9-5)

07944 680320 (Out of hours, Mon-Fri)

**Out of hours:** Phone cover for advice/guidance over weekends and bank holidays is provided by the thirtyone:eight safeguarding helpline. They can be contacted on 0303 003 1111.

Please also visit our safeguarding page which includes contact details for other support agencies.

<https://gloucester.anglican.org/about-us/safeguarding/survivors/>