

I don't know if this is of any value to anyone but myself, but here it goes.

I first need to state that I have no first hand knowledge of the events involving the victims, Mark Campobello, Monsignor Jarmoluk, or anyone at St. Peter's or the Rockford Archdiocese. Though I was living in (and still do) the neighboring community of Batavia at the time the arrest and the investigation, I am not a member of St. Peter's nor of the Catholic parish in Batavia.

What I do have is some historical experiences that may be food for thought.

From hearing that charges had been brought against Mark, to seeing photos of his arrest, to seeing video of his gaunt frame as he left Illinois River, and now to reading he has been incarcerated for a parole violation, it has been shocking and surreal to see how far a person can fall and how differently the lives of classmates and good friends can turn out.

I was very, very good friends with Mark Campobello from my junior year at Crystal Lake Central High School up through my senior year at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. In High School, we had several study halls together. We went to senior dinner together, and hung out quite a bit. After High School, he went to Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio, and I spent my first two years completing an Associate of Art degree at McHenry County College before continuing on at NIU. We got together a lot when we were both home from school. Often, we would go out and sit at the bar at the Silver Nugget Saloon in Crystal Lake and talk for hours. Most of the conversation revolved around the Catholic church, theology, what we were studying in school, aspirations, and goals. I even went to visit him a couple of times at St. Mary of the Lakes when he kept a room there. As I said, we were very good friends.

Looking back, I should have been more honest with myself about things I saw and things that he told me that were not good. They involved drinking that was (early on) under-aged for Mark – and regularly excessive. He laughingly told me many stories of drinking parties and rolling bar carts at the Josephinum. I witnessed under-aged drinking on two occasions when I saw him out to dinner with Father McKitrick of the St. Thomas parish and rectory of Crystal Lake. Mark was still in High School at the time, but was already committed to pursuing the priesthood. I remember going to a social (a couple of years later when we were of age) at the St. John the Baptist Rectory in Johnsbury, Illinois that was hosted by Father Holdren. Father Holdren was practically shoving drinks into our hands. He mixed a Tanqueray and Tonic for me that was so strong I could not drink it. He kept asking me why I wasn't drinking my drink and telling me to "drink up". I felt so much pressure that I snuck into the kitchen to water down so I could drink it. Mark caught me doing it, and got excited because he was afraid Father Holdren would flip out if he caught me or found out.

Going home that night, I realized that I should have either taken the keys from Mark, or not gotten in the car with him at all. He was all over the road, and I remember thinking, "This is how people end up a statistic, why am I so stupid as to be in the car with a drunk driver". It was eerie to read the words of one of the victims as she described being in the car with him and realizing he was too impaired to drive.

This is not to further impugn Mark. My point is that I saw his mentors and his religious environment not only failing to discourage drinking, but seeming to actually encourage it. Of course, this is merely my opinion and my memories of events that happened more than fifteen years ago. However, my memories are very clear. I must add that I never had any conversations with Mark or saw any behavior that suggested the troubles that would lead to his eventual incarceration.

I fell out of contact with Mark around 1988 when I moved to the southeastern states. After my return to the Chicagoland area around 1996, I started going back to my old favorite bar and

restaurant in Crystal Lake – The Silver Nugget. I was good friends with the owners up to the time they decided to close restaurant and retire. Mark had continued to be a patron for some time after I moved, but at some point stopped coming in. The owners knew what good friends we had been, and would ask me every now and then if I had gotten back in touch with him. So many times I thought about doing so, but never did. In light of what has transpired, I am not sure whether or not I regret not doing so.

The owners told me there were a couple of times where they cut Mark off or would not serve him because he had obviously had enough. One of the owners also told me in came in once with injuries from a car accident. It made her wonder about the circumstances of the accident. Of course this is here say, but it was very believable to me and consistent with what I had seen several years earlier.

As I look at the video of Mark leaving Illinois River, I have to wonder if he would be the broken person he is today if he had chosen a path other than the priesthood. From what I saw in my years of friendship with him, I can't help but think he would not. He was very likeable, social, highly intelligent, well educated, and from a good family. We all have our failings, and drinking was one of his. Outside of that, I thought him to be a person of high character. He had everything needed for a bright and successful future, and it was crushing to me when I heard the news of the allegations and then of his pleading guilty.

Before closing, I want to clarify that I do not feel sorry for Mark or blame others for his actions, and I do not at all blame the victims or the church for his abuse. I firmly believe that there is no other option in life other than to ultimately take full responsibility for our choices. I read all of the police reports and interviews, and to me the descriptions of his behavior are that of a con artist. However, I also believe his religious mentors in those early years were enablers when it came to alcohol, and just maybe he did not become what he did all at once. I am not saying alcohol should be fully blamed. We all know, though, that alcohol lowers inhibitions, and abuse of it often indicates, exacerbates, and procreates other problems. I wonder what mentoring he received in the years after we fell out of contact, and if it was just as enabling as what I witnessed. Lacking the Wisdom of Solomon, I will always wonder.

I pray for St. Peter's; no parish should be torn apart by anything like this.

Sincerely,

Craig Wassel