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Dear Mr. Andreatta,

I read with interest your recent piece on the Rochester Diocese and its abuse cases. Thank you for it, and for continuing to shine a light on this terrible story and the crushing damage done to so many people because of these men.

Now, I want to tell you a story which carries some of those same echoes but that may hit a little closer to home for you.

In the early 1980s, I worked as a paper delivery boy for your Democrat & Chronicle, at the age of 11-12 and in the Eastbrooke Lane area of Brighton where I lived with my mom and older brother. I took the job as we did not have a ton of money growing up. My Mom raised us by herself and dealt with a host of medical issues that kept her – and us – financially very tight. The extra \$15-20 a week I could earn and bring in for the family was helpful, at least it seemed to me it was at the time.

So I worked every morning, waking up at 5:30 am to deliver papers, throughout the condo complex there off of French Road, and eventually expanding to a few other of the apartment complexes in the area. I was good at what I did: I worked hard, I was enterprising, and I was a good talker when I had to go make collections from subscribers at night and on the weekends. I even built a wooden sled to help me carry the Sunday papers in the snowy winters we all knew growing up there.

Sounds somewhat idyllic, doesn't it?

Sort of the classic tale of a hard-working young man, trying to help his family; one that might bring a smile and make your heart warm under different circumstances. However, and tragically for me, it did not end up that way.

What happened? Jack Lazeroff happened.

And who is Jack Lazeroff? He was my route manager and District Manager for the Democrat & Chronicle in the early 1980s (and likely before and after), overseeing lots of paperboys like me. Now you might be sensing what is coming and why I write this.

You see Jack Lazeroff was my boss. But more than that he was in control of me, a little part of me, in that role as a boss. And how did he treat me? From that position of authority? I bet you might have a guess now ...

I remember one of the first times he touched me.

He would ask to meet me in the afternoons for our “weekly meeting”, always set by him for after school, when he had learned my older brother would still be at school playing afterschool sports, and my Mom would of course be at work. Jack Lazeroff would come then, to talk about my work, our unpaid subscribers and the like. This specific time though, he wanted me to show him around the house, to see “what the basement looked like”. And I took him down there of course. He was my boss, what did I know other than to do what he asked? What I learned then in that afternoon though, was that some men are horrific in how they think and act and what they want. And what did Jack Lazeroff want? He wanted me. And he managed to take me there, in our laundry room, molesting me, and when the results of his work spilled on my shirt, he had me put the shirt in the washing machine and turned it on, so no one knew.

I was shocked, and scared, and embarrassed. And two seeds of hate were planted in my heart that afternoon. One for Jack Lazeroff, and tragically, one for me.

Also, that same afternoon, he told me I was now to receive a regular additional payment of \$5 weekly in cash from him, since I was doing such a great job. So I was now able to bring in more money for my family, wasn't I? At the time, that's where my head went.

And so that second seed of hate – of self-hatred – started to flourish. I needed the money, or so I thought, but hated what I had to do for it, and that I couldn't speak up or punch him the face, or anything.

Jack Lazeroff continued molesting me for many months, almost a full year. His abuse grew in frequency and in location, to times we would meet in his car and he would be signing my route slips, and ask me to help him as he “had an itch down there”. He even asked me if I wanted to meet with one of his other paper boys who “was just like me.” I knew what he meant. He also asked me if I knew any other boys like me who he might be able to hire. I also knew what that meant. And his \$5 extra every week came.

That was my life, when I was eleven and twelve, when I should have been doing and living like boys should be at that age. Do you remember what boys that age should be like?

They should be happy, and eager, and a little daring, and rough in ways and gentle in ways. They should have dreams of their future and their future selves, hopefully really big ones. And they should have hopes and ideas and boundless energy and endless optimism. Most of all they should have a future that they can dream to shape.

Somehow though Jack Lazeroff thought that what was mine: my body, my soul, my hopes and dreams did not matter in his moments with me, or that they were somehow were his to use as he wanted. From the moment he put his hands on me, even before, when he was planning and grooming me to put his hands on me, he robbed me.

His urges and actions robbed me of everything that I had. And he robbed me of not just those moments and the time after he touched me when it hurt so much and scared me so much and embarrassed me so much.

He robbed me of the chance to be me. He made me something different. I hate that he had that power over me. And I hate that he still has that power over me. I truly hate myself for that.

That hatred – for myself – has crushed me, it may even destroy me.

I am 47 now, and some shell of the man I could have been. You see every time I get to the point of success and happiness in my life – for decades now – memories of Jack Lazeroff, and his work, come flooding back. And I destruct. I panic, I freeze, I catastrophize, I give up and let go of that success of those happy possibilities, I become overtaken by my nightmares and fears. For more than 35 years this has been my life. I cannot possibly allow myself to be happy because I hate myself. Because ... Jack Lazeroff and the Democrat and Chronicle.

These past two months have been particularly bad. I don't know why, but they have. I contemplate suicide, even though I have a beautiful family and two young kids of my own. I have let my work go to hell and am staring at ruin coming from so many angles now. I am unraveling.

Those two seeds of hate are flourishing. Unfortunately, from what I understand Jack Lazeroff has died, so I can't confront him. And you see where the seed of hate for myself is going.

So here I am, damaged and destroyed like those who felt the abuse from the diocese. What do you think of me? Of my story? Will you tell it? How will I get to feel better? What good will it do if I tell it? How will I tell it?

What becomes of me? Why did the Democrat and Chronicle allow this to happen to me? And likely to other boys? What do you think?

I hope you have the nerve to speak, to address this. I hope the Democrat and Chronicle and Gannett does too.

And I hope I can find some way to fix this, in some fashion.

I know my life is worth it, as are the lives of my family. Unfortunately, it seems today I just cannot find that path forward.

What do you say? What do you say to me? Can you find some words and actions for the indignities done to me? Who will pay for this toll on my life?

I am R L Bates. That is my life.