



Here's **Looking** at You, Kathy Shaw - With Reverence

Photo by Renee Whitenett

By Richard Nangle

“Spotlight” is a great movie. But for those of us who worked at the Worcester Telegram & Gazette back in 2002 it ends abruptly. When the Boston Globe took the baton from the Boston Phoenix and brought the clergy sex abuse story to the mainstream, that gave every media outlet in the country an excuse to localize.

Under the umbrella of the Globe at the time, the T&G wanted its piece of the story right away – whatever that story might have been.

Kathy Shaw had been on the clergy abuse beat before, with George Griffin. They had done some great work. But it was for a brief time and those stories were in the rearview mirror when Shaw was asked to take a second look about a week after the Globe began its devastating coverage of the Boston Archdiocese. She knew the story was there and she had the sources to make it come to life. I was lucky enough to be chosen to team up with her. It was a wild ride that yielded 18 months of coverage.

I first met Kathy Shaw at a Worcester Telegram & Gazette staff meeting during a time when some of us in the suburban bureaus were organizing a union. We knew the union wasn't going anywhere without city newsroom supporters. Kathy was an early and enthusiastic supporter. She spread the gospel to her colleagues.

Kathy was a T&G old timer even back then – the early 1990s. She had seen the family-owned paper shift to out-of-town ownership and was worried about her future and that of her co-workers.

Up until that point, I had only known Kathy by her byline. At this particular staff meeting, suburban reporters mixed with the city staff, some talking about the pending union drive. It was a time to tap latent empowerment. Kathy had plenty of that. She became part of our union inner circle and in a short time, a leader.

Kathy's laughter and enthusiasm was infectious. The early days of the union energized the newsroom. We won election easily. But that energy was put to the test while we were 10 years without a contract in a span that began with San Francisco Chronicle ownership and ended with The New York Times Co. Kathy was on the forefront of the resistance, attending meetings and organizing rallies. We did not crumble. We became stronger. She was a major reason why.

Kathy was the paper's religion reporter, writing about a rector taking a sabbatical, local men being ordained as priests, or a congregation praying for its ailing leader.

She had an easy and readable style. She began a story about how religious people view personal finance this way:

Money in America is linked to God, at least among the churchgoers.

A study done at the behest of the Lutheran Brotherhood shows many Americans also regularly pray to God before making major financial decisions.

Regular churchgoers are more inclined to save money regularly and to lend money to someone in need, while those who rarely pray are not as easy with a dole-out.

She was a strong writer, a skill that served her well when she got back on the clergy sex abuse beat.

While there were several high points during that time, one would definitely be the St. Patrick's Day Eve Saturday when Bishop Daniel Reilly finally agreed to have us to his home for an interview that he had steadfastly avoided throughout the early weeks of our coverage. But the cascade of devastating front page stories clearly was not going to end anytime soon, and suddenly Reilly was dealing with Kathy in a more adversarial setting than he was used to.

Both as a reporter and devout Catholic, Kathy took the clergy sexual abuse crisis personally. While always being fair to the accused, she cast her lot with the victims. She and I convinced several of them to come forward and tell their stories, despite the fact that many had received cash settlements that required signing nondisclosure agreements they were afraid to break.

As each victim came forward, others were empowered to do the same. Kathy had that rare ability to be genuinely empathetic – not simply looking for the next story but actually caring

about the people she was writing about. All of that made our jobs much easier than they might have been.

We wrote about victims and spent many days in court as local priests were brought up on charges. Kathy broke the story of a confidential 1962 Vatican document that instructed church officials in the finer points of covering up allegations of sexual abuse. While she was writing it, I went on television to talk about it with Chet Curtis of New England Cable News. I couldn't put a sentence together. I didn't yet fully understand the document nor could I pronounce its Latin name – Crimen Sollicitationis. Curtis, smooth as ever, managed to talk me through it. Kathy was roaring in the background as the staff watched on television at the city desk. It was one of many Kathy Shaw moments that for me are etched in stone.

Her work was being noticed by the survivor community and upon retirement she began to aggregate full time for the Abuse Tracker at www.bishopaccountability.org. Clergy abuse was a worldwide problem and Kathy was posting stories from news sites all over the world.

As perhaps a precursor of things to come, Kathy wrote the following in a T&G story that appeared on June 17, 2005:

While American Catholic bishops met yesterday in Chicago to discuss whether to make changes in national sexual abuse policies adopted in 2002, another organization, BishopAccountability.org, worked quietly at its Waltham headquarters expanding its national database of priests accused of sexual misconduct.

Kathy's work on the Abuse Tracker earned her an obituary in The New York Times. There are not a lot of journalists who will get that. But she richly deserved it. Her coverage was fierce as was her determination to do solid investigative work.

When Kathy went into the hospital last year, things did not look good. She was seriously ill and her once prolific Facebook page went dark. But after several months she rallied and seemed to be on the mend.

In April, upon learning I was running for a local office in the town of Brookline, MA, she sent a campaign donation and later an email that read in part:

"I am still in rehab but making serious progress toward walking again ... I also died a couple of times but my doctor said I am one tough cookie. I think the fact that I never smoked and was in good health when this happened is what saved me. They were so sure I was going to die when admitted to St. Vincent that some doctor actually had the nerve to ask if I had a funeral home in mind! I think that is the moment when I knew I was seriously ill."

That was the last time I heard from Kathy. The news of her death is difficult to take.

It is useful at this time to remember both her genuine goodness as a person and that in her working life she did what news reporters are supposed to do – make a difference.