Martin Pre-Schooler: 'I Lied'

A long-delayed apology from one of the accusers in the notorious McMartin Pre-School molestation case

By Kyle Zirpolo, as told to Debbie Nathan

https://web.archive.org/web/20090315072848/http://freejesse.net/LATimes/I%20Lied!.htm

My mother divorced my father when I was 2 and she met my stepfather, who was a police officer in Manhattan Beach. addition, my stepfather has three older children. In the combined family, I'm the only one of the nine children he didn' to love me. I was always trying excessively hard to please him. I would do anything for him.

My stepbrothers and stepsisters and a half-brother and half-sister went to McMartin. So did I. I only remember being h about the school□no bad auras or vibes or anything. Even to this day, talking about it or seeing pictures or artwork tha feelings. All my memories are positive.

The thing I remember about the case was how it took over the whole city and consumed our whole family. My parents ever do things to you?" They talked about Ray Buckey, whom I had never met. I don't even have any recollection of hir there.

The first time I went to CII [Children's Institute International, now known as Children's Institute, Inc., a respected centu organization where approximately 400 former McMartin children were interviewed and given genital exams, and whe victims], we drove there, our whole family. I remember waiting □ for hours while my brothers and sisters were being in days or if it was just one day, but my memory tells me it was weeks, it seemed so long. It was an ordeal. I remember th out of here unless I tell them what they want to hear."

We were examined by a doctor. I took my clothes off and lay down on the table. They checked my butt, my penis. Ther stuffed animals and dolls. The dolls were pasty white and had hair where the private parts were. They wanted us to tal weird.

I remember them asking extremely uncomfortable questions about whether Ray touched me and about all the teache telling them nothing happened to me. I remember them almost giggling and laughing, saying, "Oh, we know these thin go ahead and tell us? Use these dolls if you're scared."

Anytime I would give them an answer that they didn't like, they would ask again and encourage me to give them the a obvious what they wanted. I know the types of language they used on me: things like I was smart, or I could help the o

I felt uncomfortable and a little ashamed that I was being dishonest. But at the same time, being the type of person I w do, I would do. And I thought they wanted me to help protect my little brother and sister who went to McMartin.

Later my parents asked if the teachers took pictures and played games with us. Games like "Naked Movie Star." I reme if they sang the song, and I didn't know what she was talking about, so she would sing something like, "Who you are, y that's the first time I ever heard that: from my mom. After she asked me a hundred times, I probably said yeah, I did pl

My parents were very encouraging when I said that things happened. It was almost like saying things happened was go

stop them from what they were trying to do to kids. Also, there were so many kids saying all these things happened th
nothing did. You wouldn't be believed if you said that.

I remember feeling like they didn't pick just anybody they picked me because I had a good memory of what they want
good job. I don't think they thought I was telling the truth, just that I was telling the same stories consistently, doing w
teachers judged guilty. I felt special. Important.

It always seemed like I was thinking. I would listen to what my parents would say if they were talking, or to what some
questioned at the police station or anywhere. And I would repeat things. Or if it wasn't a story I'd heard, I would think
think of the worst thing possible that would be harmful to a child. I remember once I said that if you had a cut, instead
teachers would put on dirt, then put the Band-Aid over the dirt. That was just something in my head that was bad. I jus
investigators].

I think I got the satanic details by picturing our church. We went to American Martyrs, which was a huge Catholic churc
would last an hour, hour and a half. None of us wanted to go: It was kicking and screaming all the way there. Sitting, st
was picture the altar, pews and stained-glass windows, and if [investigators] said, "Describe an altar," I would describe
"There was a priest in a green suit" someone who was real I would say, "A man dressed in red as a cult member." Fro
good, and the devil is bad and has horns and is about evil and red and blood. I'd just throw a twist in there with Satan a

I remember going in our van with all my brothers and sisters and driving to airports and houses and being asked if we l
remember telling people [that the McMartin teachers] took us to Harry's Meat Market, and describing what I thought
there before, and I was fairly certain I was going to get in trouble for what I was saying because it probably was not acc
"They don't have that kind of freezer there." And they did say that. But then someone said, "Well, they could have cha
everything I said would be believed.

The lawyers had all my stories written down and knew exactly what I had said before. So I knew I would have to say th
anything be different, otherwise they would know I was lying. I put a lot of pressure on myself. At night in bed, I would
past and try to repeat only the things I knew I'd said before.

I remember describing going to an airport and Ray taking us somewhere on an airplane. Then I realized the parents wo
the school. I felt I'd screwed up and my lie had been caught I was busted! I was so upset with myself! I remember brea
knew I was lying. But my parents said, "You're doing fine. Don't worry." And everyone was saying how proud they were

I'm not saying nothing happened to anyone else at the McMartin Pre-School. I can't say that I can only speak for myse
Maybe some kids made up stories about things that didn't really happen, and eventually started believing they were te
that the teachers would get their families because they were lying. But I never forgot I was lying.

My stepdad was a police officer who had guns in the house. I remember when all of this was coming down, he was put
because he was being investigated for supposedly threatening the McMartin family. He was cleared of that accusation
9 years old at the time, I thought my dad was saying he would kill the McMartins. So in my mind, I figured no one from
him because he would have hurt them first. That made me feel secure. It could be a reason I never mixed up reality an

But the lying really bothered me. One particular night stands out in my mind. I was maybe 10 years old and I tried to te
lay on the bed crying hysterically I wanted to get it off my chest, to tell her the truth. My mother kept asking me to ple

she would never believe me. She persisted: "I promise I'll believe you! I love you so much! Tell me what's bothering yo
she wouldn't believe me, and she kept assuring me she would. I remember finally telling her, "Nothing happened! Not
school."

She didn't believe me.

We had a highly dysfunctional family. We argued and fought all the time. My mother has always blamed anything nega
preschool and were molested. To this day, she believes these things went on. Because if they didn't, how can she expla
can't open up with her about my personal problems. She's always asking me why I never do. That one night skewed ou

Once the case was over, it was just over, in the past. The defendants were set free and that was it. The kids' parents ne
Why were they unable to find evidence to convict these people?"

My family has not seen the movies or read the books questioning the prosecution. It's like skeletons in a closet that yo
only one who ever brings the topic up and who admits nothing ever happened to me. I've said I lied about everything,
from my mother and stepfather. It seems really strange, seeing their reaction to the fact that nothing happened to me
child was molested, I would be elated to find out that he or she wasn't. I'd like to think learning that your child was not
After all, all you have is your next day. It would be a shame to live the rest of your life thinking molestation had happer

McMartin is something negative in my life and I'm trying to make it a positive. I've got two little kids I love dearly they
goal is to raise them as best as I can and try to lead by example. I want to be totally honest with them, to say, "This is s
something dishonest, then at some point I was able to be honest about it." I want my children to be able to come to m

I'm a supermarket manager, and the thing I like best about my job is the interactions I get to have with customers' kids
been told I would be perfect for opening a children's day care. That's very ironic. I would love to look at the defendants
them, "I'm sorry."

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How and Why Kyle Came Forward

By Debbie Nathan

I first heard from Kyle Zirpolo via e-mail early this summer. He contacted me because I appear in the documentary film
had just seen.

Members of the Friedman family were accused of mass child molestation in Long Island, N.Y., in the 1980s. Research I
of the allegations were false, and in the film I talk about this. I also discuss the McMartin case. I looked into it, while co
the national panic over sex abuse in day-care centers and schools in the 1980s.

Zirpolo found my website and wrote that he was chilled by the film's depiction of the Friedman family being destroyed
basically the same as the McMartins. I did that. I feel very ashamed."

Nothing he told police and prosecutors about being abused was true, he added. He had regretted it for years. Now he

person. I told Zirpolo I wanted to hear his story. I also offered to put him in touch with the McMartin defendants.

Some are dead, including Virginia McMartin and her daughter Peggy McMartin Buckey. Ray Buckey and his sister, Pegg
teacher, Babette Spitler, declined to meet with Zirpolo. They've always staunchly proclaimed their innocence, and say
students, who were children and couldn't help themselves. Peggy Ann has said that they would rather hear from the p
prosecutors, doctors and parents who fueled the case.

Zirpolo says his mother and stepfather divorced years ago. I couldn't reach his stepfather, and when I contacted his mo
says she "doesn't agree" with his decision to tell his story. As for his stepfather, all Zirpolo will say is that he's very ill.

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How Kyle's Story Snowballed

James M. Wood, a research psychologist at the University of Texas at El Paso, has studied the McMartin interviews dor
Giving children dolls and puppets during a forensic interview encourages them to pretend and fantasize instead of stic
interviewer refuses to take "no" for an answer, this implies that another response is required even if it's not true. Sayi
being followed by undercover police implies that the accused is dangerous and that the children should help lock him u
"everyone's talking" about the crime "creates conformity pressures that are highly improper."

A few years ago, Wood did an experiment in which children were questioned using McMartin interviewing techniques.
kids started to make up bizarre stories. According to Maggie Bruck, a psychiatry professor at Johns Hopkins University
and suggestibility, Wood's experiment and others have led to a consensus among psychologists. They agree now that C
inappropriate.

CII Senior Vice President Steve Ambrose says his organization is "not in the business of promoting false allegations and
case of its type. [Experts have] learned a great amount [since then] about how to interview children about sexual abus
criminal justice system. This remains very difficult. But we're more sensitive now about making sure that the way we in
that what we say will not be taken out of context."

The following is a condensed transcript of a March 10, 1984, CII interview with Kyle Sapp, now known as Kyle Zirpolo. S
staffers. D.N.

Kyle: Mr. Ray [Ray Buckey] didn't work there when I was in there.

Interviewer 1: What do you mean?

Kyle: Yeah, he didn't go there.

Interviewer 1: A long time ago some of the kids said that there were some secrets from that school some crummy th
about our secret machine right here, and our puppets who are real smart guys like Mr. Snake Here's Pac-Man And, um
were and how they helped kids talk about some stuff sometimes and we've been playing detective and maybe Pac-M
wouldn't have to .What do you think?

Kyle: (nods).

Interviewer 1: We can talk about those secrets now, Pac-Man. And you can help Kyle everybody's talking about it no
you one of our special secrets 'cause we have a secret that we've been telling all the kids, and this one is you're going
dad is a policeman. We know that sometimes Mr. Ray was at that school. He wasn't a teacher then, but we know tha
that, Pac-Man?

Kyle: He didn't work there, but I know that when [another child] was there, it happened.

Interviewer 1: Well, you know what? We know that even before Kyle was there [Ray] was there. And we know that he

Kyle: They said on TV that he did something.

Interviewer 1: We know this about Mr. Ray: That sitting outside Mr. Ray's house is a special policeman in a regular car.
like that, but he, um, sits in a regular-looking car outside Mr. Ray's house. He watches all the time, and if Mr. Ray goe
policeman follows him. He'll be right behind him and he won't even know he's there.Think that's a good idea, Pac-M

Kyle: Uh-huh.

Interviewer 1: We got a mountain of dolls here. Here's a little girl. Easy to tell she's a girl. She has a bow, and her vagin
'em up, and everything. You should've seen [another child] beating 'em up. Boy we had a good time

Interviewer 2: Beating up Mr. Ray doll.

Interviewer 1: And, um, let's see. I wonder, Pac-Man, if you remember any of the games that you used to play at that s

Kyle: Yeah.

Interviewer 1: Yeah? Like which ones do you remember?

Kyle: Like Mr. Ray he would he would get his camera, and then he they would they would he would take their pant
pool and they then he would take pictures.

Interviewer 2: Your mom and dad already know that game 'cause they heard it from other kids' moms and dads.

Interviewer 1: Did any other teachers play, Pac-Man?

Kyle: Yeah they took pictures too.

Interviewer 1: Oh, boy. Gee, we're really figuring this out. What a big help you are. My goodness.

Kyle Zirpolo is a 30-year-old former McMartin Pre-School student who now manages a supermarket on California's cen
New York and coauthor, with appellate attorney Michael Snedeker, of "Satan's Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of
also is a board member of the National Center for Reason and Justice, a nonprofit group that works to educate the pub
abuse.