

# Would you blow the whistle on sex abuse?

You might think so, until you read about Helen and Perry Dunlop, nice small-town folks who unearthed a local abuse scandal, sounded the alarm and found themselves ostracized and threatened. By Moira Farr

**L**ike any loving parents, Helen Dunlop and her husband, Perry, proudly display pictures of their children throughout their home, a modest white-with-blue-trim two-storey on a quiet street in Cornwall, Ont. In the bright living room, pride of place goes to a large studio portrait of the couple's three daughters, Marlee, Heather and Monica, now aged 9, 8 and 7 - "our darling girls," says Helen with a smile of deep affection. Dressed in their velvet-and-lace Sunday best, grins wide, they are, in this captured moment, an enchanting picture of happy childhood.

But there is another photograph that Helen Dunlop wants to show to a visitor. Tears well up in her eyes as she takes it down from where it hangs less noticeably near the kitchen. "I'm glad I have this," she says, gazing at the image. "It will always remind me of the grief." And it's true, the children in this

picture, the same ones who beam in the living-room portrait, seem transformed. They are arrayed around their father, whose tired eyes and creased forehead age him beyond his, at the time, 35 years. No one is smiling. Perry Dunlop and his daughters instead wear world-weary, guarded expressions. Young Marlee, in the moment the newspaper photographer snapped the shutter, has raised her arm, her small hand cupped inward, as though she might shield herself and her family from this intrusion, and in the next moment, cover her mouth in a classic "speak no evil" pose.

For the past five years, Marlee's parents have found it necessary to speak, often and without flinching, about the great evil of sexual abuse. An evil reaching within the Roman Catholic Church and into other positions of power in this heavily Catholic farming-and-pulp-mill community of 47,000 in southeastern Ontario. An evil

that, long before the Dunlops learned of it and blew the whistle on a community-wide coverup, shattered the lives of many people. An evil, in all its burdensome complexity, that has come to be known, in Dunlop family shorthand, simply as The Case.

The Dunlops have protected their young daughters from the brutal details of The Case as best they can. But it's hard to hide 16 boxes of documents that, in Helen's words, "make the dining room look like a law office." Hard to break off conversations each time a child comes bouncing into a room, and to hear the dejection in a small voice that says, "Oh, you're talking about The Case again, aren't you, Mommy?" Hard to maintain a normal routine in a home where the phone often rings nonstop and where perfect strangers have been known to drop in day and night with tales of sex abuse and its chilling consequences. "It was easier when the girls were younger," >

REACTOR, ALAIN PILON



The allegations hit close to home. Father Charles MacDonald married Helen and Perry Dunlop in 1989.

says Helen, "but now they're starting to ask questions. It has affected them, I'll be honest."

For a mother so passionately committed to her family, who was herself the 10th of 13 children raised on a nearby farm in the staunchly Catholic community of St. Andrews, that is a

ordinary people across the country, while remaining persistent thorns in the side of a powerful few who would rather remain silent on the matter of sex abuse and institutional corruption within their own community? Helen Dunlop, described by friends and family as a carefree "life of the party" kind of person, often ponders that question herself. "We didn't say to each other, 'Honey, let's have five years of bullshit in our lives,'" says the blunt-spoken 42-year-old with a wry tone. Her voice carries a touch of Scots-Irish rural Ontario, a legacy of her pioneer roots in the Cornwall area.

For Helen, The Case began one sunny afternoon in September 1993. She was in the kitchen when Perry came home and told her to take the girls to the neighbour's across the road, that he had some news. Helen thought it was a bit melodramatic, but bundled up her kids - then aged 2, 3 and 4 - anyway. When her husband said, "I found out something today and our lives will never be the same," she knew he meant it.

Still, she was hardly prepared for what that something was. Perry, a police constable with the Cornwall force, had overheard a conversation between officers about a sex-abuse complaint that had been filed and then

happy when Perry Dunlop went to his bosses and pointed out that they were bound by law to report the allegations to the Children's Aid Society (CAS). He was told the case was closed and to mind his own business. Stunned, he took the file to the Cornwall CAS. With that single act, Perry Dunlop unwittingly opened Pandora's Box, out of which were about to slither generations of a community's darkest secrets. Even, alleges Perry and now others, the organized abuse of children over the past four decades that amounted to what he calls a pedophile "clan."

A special Ontario Provincial Police investigation known as Project Truth hasn't turned up any evidence of an ongoing pedophile ring. But, to date, 10 men have been charged with 60 counts of molesting more than a dozen boys. The accused represent a cross section of Cornwall's establishment, from the city's former coroner to several high-profile businessmen. Astonishingly, one of the accused is the lawyer who brokered the original payoff for the Church; at one time he headed the area's Catholic school board. For a brief time, his identity was protected by a publication ban - a ban that some say should never have been granted. Three priests and a Christian Brother have also been charged.

To say the initial allegations hit close to home is an understatement. Charles MacDonald was the priest who had married the Dunlops four years earlier and who had baptized their eldest daughter; he still ran an altar-boy program attended by at least one young relative. Helen and Perry were "dyed-in-the-wool Catholics," with Helen born into the religion and Perry converting when they married. "We were into it deep; for us it was more than an hour of feel-good on Sunday," says Helen, recalling the weekend retreats they attended.

It was hard to believe the allegations against MacDonald. Harder still to believe the Church could be involved in a coverup. Yet why would the diocese agree to maintain confidentiality for its cash settlement? (Bad legal advice, according to the diocese, which sued its own lawyer after realizing it was an improper agreement in a >

## Everyone involved in the payoff, from the bishop to the then-chief of police, claims they didn't like it. But no one was happy when Perry cried foul.

painful reality. Yet it's also the thought of the damage done by The Case to her family and to others that keeps her pursuing the justice that has proved so elusive. For all the sacrifices, Helen Dunlop, who frequently invokes the motto "Faith involves risk," believes she is doing the only right thing. At this point, she just cannot imagine doing otherwise.

How did a small-town nurse and her policeman husband, by their own account "normal everyday people," end up as heroes to sexual abuse victims and

withdrawn. He was shocked when he read in the case file that the complaint alleged abuse going back 20 years, suffered by a man now in his 30s at the hands of Charles MacDonald, a popular local priest, and Ken Seguin, a probation officer. A \$32,000 settlement paid to the victim had been brokered by lawyers for MacDonald and the Roman Catholic Church, with an agreement not to press charges or speak of the matter publicly.

Although everyone involved in that now infamous deal, from the bishop to the then-chief of police, has since claimed they didn't like it, no one was



One family, one Case: Helen and the girls in happier times (left); Perry in their living room with case files; showing the strain.

case involving alleged sexual abuse of a minor.) It wasn't as though there weren't similar examples of silence about sexual abuse on the part of the Roman Catholic Church, from Newfoundland's Mount Cashel orphanage to St. Joseph's training school in Alfred, Ont., and St. John's training school in Uxbridge, Ont., where a high-profile police investigation had uncovered a litany of abuse cases within and beyond the Church. Still, in your own backyard, "It shakes you to your foundations," says Helen. "You have to reassess your whole value system."

While neither Perry nor Helen ever doubted the righteousness of Perry's act, in a profession that prizes respect for authority, he had committed a cardinal sin in disobeying orders. The sit-

forward, later naming Perry in a lawsuit against the police and the CAS for invasion of privacy. Perry's employers, the Cornwall police force, charged him with breach of confidence and discreditable conduct. Some of his peers resented the implication that they were negligent, while he took kudos as a solo champion of helpless children. It wasn't long before Perry was sitting in his kitchen in the middle of the day telling a stunned Helen that tensions were so palpable, he could not do his work. For three years, awaiting a decision from the Police Services Board, he was off on stress leave, sleeping little and eventually taking antidepressants.

For people like the Dunlops, who had never bucked the system ("We weren't out saving the whales," says

nurse, with a love song he'd written and a marriage proposal - that this is what their lives would be like today, "I would have said, 'You've got the wrong person.'"

Perry was eventually exonerated of all wrongdoing in two separate disciplinary processes. Today he has his job back with the Cornwall force, but not before almost three years of having his and his family's life torn to pieces. It wasn't just the police who took exception to Perry's renegade act. In a town the size of Cornwall, and with a family as large and extended as Helen's - she has 50 nieces and nephews - there were bound to be repercussions. One of Perry's former fellow officers is married to a sister of Helen's, which has strained family relations to this day. Other devout Catholics were stunned to learn of the sex-abuse complaint and refused to believe the allegations. Death threats came their way, including one from an unstable woman against Marlee, the Dunlops' oldest daughter.

Stinging breaches in family loyalty and community support followed. Some friends "just stopped calling," says Helen, whose home had often been the centre of warm impromptu gatherings. The Church hierarchy was silent. "Not one priest has come to my door since this all happened," says Helen, a surprise to her, given the Dunlops' prior Church ties. Hurt and disillusioned, Helen and Perry haven't set foot in church in five years and will not see their girls confirmed in the faith that once meant so much to them.

But it's only the Church she's lost faith in, not God, Helen often says. It's a faith both she and Perry have had to draw on in their tough times. ▷

## Death threats came their way, including one against Marlee, the Dunlops' 9-year-old daughter. "We have been living a nightmare," says Helen.

uation worsened when the police file was leaked to an Ottawa television station (Perry denies any part in the leak).

It got downright ugly when Helen appealed directly to the complainant to reject the payoff and go public with his allegations. For someone like Helen, so rooted in community, the notion of anonymity was foreign; approaching the victim seemed to her a direct and common-sense way of confronting a bad situation. But in doing so, she had crossed the line from supportive wife to crusader in her own right. And to her surprise, the move backfired.

The complainant refused to come

Helen), it was a perplexing blow. As other complainants came forward (to date, MacDonald has been charged with 16 counts of sex-related crimes against eight boys between 1967 and 1983), the unfairness of disciplining Perry for speaking out seemed all the more outrageous, and made Helen all the more determined to fight.

She may be well suited to the job, but it's certainly not one she sought. In fact, she says that if anyone had told her when she and Perry got together almost 10 years ago - in a whirlwind romance that had Perry flying to the Yukon, where Helen was working as a

MICHAEL HEBERT

Though their marriage is strong and, says Helen, they "take commitment very seriously," it comes as no surprise to learn that The Case has put a strain on them as a couple. "About the only thing we do fight about is The Case," Helen admits. "But we've always basically pulled in the same direction on it. We couldn't have lasted if we didn't," she says.

"There's no question they've been harmed," says Toronto lawyer John Morris, acting for the Dunlops in the \$1.2-million civil case Perry launched against the Cornwall police for malicious prosecution and abuse of process. "He's been made a scapegoat," says Morris, who is also representing several of Cornwall's alleged abuse victims. But the police department's defence has been "aggressive and technical," says Morris, and, as he points out, "the Dunlops can't afford to order up a team of lawyers to go at this full bore."

It's all a source of ongoing frustration, one that has added to the unresolved issues around Project Truth. Helen is quick to point to the lack of charges so far against as many as 10 people named by alleged victims (although they are being investigated). Charles MacDonald, though he has appeared in court numerous times

stable life prepared her to bear witness to such trauma. "The faces are different, but the stories are the same," she says, her own face darkening at the thought of all the people who have sat in her living room revealing their grim stories to her.

"If it hadn't been for Perry, I don't think any of this would have come out," says Albert Roy, one of those victims. As a troubled teen, Roy, now 38, was sexually abused by a local probation officer named Nelson Barque. When he complained to Barque's superior, Ken Seguin, the same man named in the original complaint Perry exposed, Seguin abused him too. (Both Barque and Seguin have since committed suicide.) Roy says the experience has echoed terribly through his life; he gave up a job with the Canadian Coast Guard because he could not shower or sleep in a room with other men, became a paranoid overprotective father with his own now-13-year-old son, and still takes medication for anxiety and depression. When he learned that Perry Dunlop was being punished for revealing that first abuse complaint, he says he felt compelled to speak publicly. Helen supported men like Roy, going to court with them when the accused made appearances, lending an ear when the going got rough. "She

a vocal champion, administering the Constable Dunlop Fund for donations toward their legal expenses; the Dunlops estimate they've spent more than \$150,000 on the suit against police, wiping out their savings and threatening the mortgage on their home. After Helen appeared on CBC Radio last August, she received dozens of letters offering support and a few donations - including one from the parents of a woman she went to nursing school with 20 years earlier.

Sylvia MacEachern, a retired nurse in Ottawa and member of the St. Brigid's Association, a Catholic lay organization, is one Catholic who sees the Dunlops' actions as an affirmation of their values and principles. MacEachern has raised funds for their legal costs and wrote about the Dunlops in the association's newsletter. "I just felt I should try to do something for them, in some small way," she says. A lot of Catholics, she adds, are simply fed up with the way the Church hierarchy deals with pedophiles and were sickened to imagine that the Dunlops would pay a higher price for speaking out than the diocese would for keeping silent on the issue.

"The people support Perry and Helen Dunlop. The power structures do not," says Robert Roth, a columnist with the local weekly, *The Seaway News*, and a longtime advocate of the Dunlops. But not everyone in town agrees. Claude McIntosh, associate editor of the local daily, *The Standard-Freeholder*, was critical of the Dunlops from the start. After Helen's interview on the local radio station, he accused her of "whining" and misrepresenting the severity of her family's financial difficulties. "She's a tough cookie, but I think they've gone in over their heads. I just don't think they should be expecting people to cover their legal costs," McIntosh says now. But even he concedes, "If the Roman Catholic Church in this diocese changes its ways, then good for them [the Dunlops]. They have rattled the cage. They have got the Church thinking."

In June 1995, it became mandatory for diocese officials to report any suspected abuse within the Church to child-protection authorities. Helen >

There's a note of sadness in a sister's voice, a best friend's, when they talk about the Helen who used to be - and who can't stop fighting now.

over the past three years, has yet to go to trial on his charges. According to the Crown, additional charges against MacDonald since the first preliminary hearing account for the delay. Helen does not mince words in expressing her disgust at the legal wrangling, technicalities and delays. "Our justice system sucks. If Canadians don't speak out about this, if this is the best we can do, then we're a bunch of wimps."

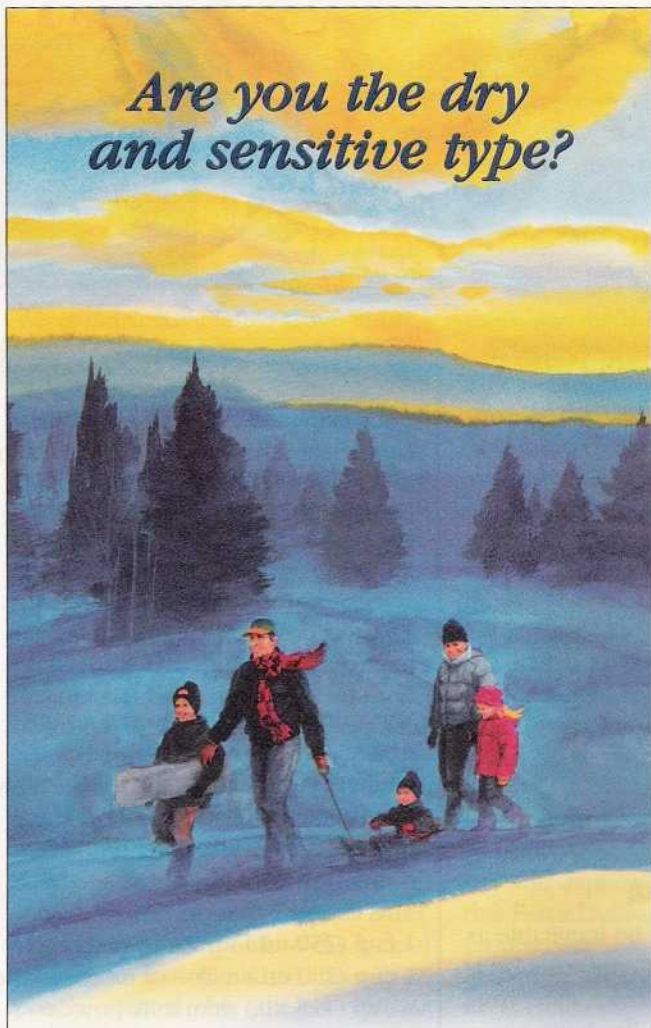
If Helen feels strongly about it, it's in part because she's opened her door and brewed countless pots of coffee for a steady stream of victims over the past five years. Nothing in her previously

really gave you confidence, she was so determined," says Roy.

Fortunately, though some key players in the Dunlops' lives retreated when controversy struck, many remained steadfast and many came on board in support. When the Cornwall *Standard-Freeholder* held a phone poll asking whether Perry Dunlop had done the right thing, 160 people called - a whopping 147 applauding his actions. Supporters started a petition in favour of Perry's actions and gathered close to 10,000 signatures opposing disciplinary action against him. Carson Chisholm, a brother of Helen's, became

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Dunlop wants a lot more than that. She wants an end to sex abuse within the Church – and justice for those who have already suffered. But with insufficient funds to cover their civil suit and the enormous personal pressure that comes with being a victims' advocate in a system that seems stacked against them, Helen admits she sometimes doesn't know if they have the strength and resources to continue. Her bone-weariness, the sense of anger and feelings of helplessness are evident. She is quick with a witty remark, but there's also a tone of confusion and bitterness in the words expressed. Tears come frequently during an interview, and dark circles under her eyes attest to a lack of sleep. She's on antidepressants and admits she is "hyper-focused" on The Case. "We have been living a nightmare," she says.

Still, for Helen, giving up is an alien concept. You could almost say that her strength is, in some fateful way, her weakness. Certainly, growing up in an atmosphere of security has given her the emotional resources to fight for those who did not. "There wasn't one moment of my childhood when I did not feel completely loved," says Helen. But she is now aware that her own childhood cost her from harsher realities. "I've matured a lot as a result of this," she says reflectively. "I used to be glib about things like depression – I would have said, 'What's your problem? Buck up.' But now I understand; if you scratch the surface, you'll find something deeper, something that happened to that person." In a grimly ironic way, as a result of the traumatizing treatment she and Perry have received from the powers that be, they can now identify with the victims' experiences of betrayal more deeply than they could ever have imagined. "We want our lives back," she says.

Friends and family want the Dunlops to have their lives back too. There's a note of sadness in a sister's voice, a best friend's, when they contemplate the Helen that used to be and the woman who can't stop fighting now. Helen knows her situation is causing her loved ones pain, but is too far into it to turn back. For now, she's consumed by her part-time jobs as a nurse and an instructor at a local business college, family matters, and of course, The Case.

There's no end in sight. "The Dunlops can't keep shouldering this alone," says columnist Roth. "There needs to be an organization of some kind to help the victims and take some of the load off Helen and Perry." It makes sense. Helen Dunlop has no intention of crossing "fight for justice" off her lengthy "to do" list. But as she hands me a jar of her own antipasto and runs into the house to answer the ringing phone, rubbing her eyes as she rushes away, I can't help wondering how long anyone, even someone with the unshakable faith of Helen Dunlop, can carry such a burden. **C**

What would you do in a case such as this? Have you ever faced a tough moral decision? Click on the Talk icon of the Chatelaine Connects Web site at [www.chatelaine.com](http://www.chatelaine.com) and then choose News and Views.