

Good evening.

My name is Jason _____, and as many of you know, I have three daughters currently in 8th, 6th, and 3rd grades at West and Central Schools. For the past 5 years I have also been an active substitute teacher at all three of the Glencoe schools.

Over the past 12 months, many of you have undoubtedly heard about, or followed the news on ABC concerning the “alleged” abuse that took place in Lake Bluff from 1974-1985. What most of you don’t know is that I was the final victim in Lake Bluff. And it wasn’t “alleged.” Last Wednesday I attended a court proceeding in Lake County and watched Charles Ritz plead guilty to a misdemeanor charge of indecent exposure dating back to May of 1985. The charge named a victim who witnessed Mr. Ritz masturbate in front of him on a Friday night after school. That victim was me. I spent 30 years pretending like it didn’t affect me or the way I looked at the world (teachers, authority, relationships).

In 1985, I told my friends who told their parents, who told my parents, and my parents told the school. The school chose to bury it, and they let him resign and I went off to high school. At the time, I was fine with this as I was completely embarrassed by the whole thing and really didn’t want to talk about it with anyone, least of all adults. And it stayed buried until June of last summer when a handful of other victims before me at Lake Bluff Junior High started coming forward. Last summer, I learned that after leaving Lake Bluff, Mr. Ritz moved to California and began a new teaching career at La Habra High School in Los Angeles where he was a math teacher and ran the Surf Club. He would take groups of boys, only boys on weekend campouts to go surfing. I have since talked to some of those kids and let’s leave it at “I got off easy.”

I chose to share this with you tonight, not because I’m looking for attention, or to remain in the victim role. It’s quite the opposite today. I really don’t want any attention at all, and I spent too many years playing the role of “victim” whether I was aware of it or not. There is no longer shame in talking about what happened. I didn’t do anything wrong; I was a 13-14 year old kid.

All the signs were there surrounding Mr. Ritz, yet nobody did anything about it. That was the past and we cannot change it. However, along with some other victims, we went to Lake Bluff looking for some answers and we got stonewalled. I want you to know there is a better way to handle this.

I know very little about the situation that took place in Glencoe in the 70/80s. What I do know is that this teacher seemingly had many of the same “warning signs” that surrounded Mr. Ritz. And when he (Martin) was recently publicly accused of wrongdoing, he attempted to defend himself by stating that the definition of pedophile is “child lover.” So is that to suggest that any of us who love kids should refer to ourselves as “Pedophiles?” I think we all know the answer to that.

Glencoe is using the exact same law firm that Lake Bluff hired and I just think the attorney's have it all backward, focusing only on damage control. I'm telling you as a victim: We are just looking for validation, answers if there are any, and perhaps an apology. Listen, if someone is angry and hurt enough, there will be a lawsuit, whether you choose to acknowledge what happened or not. But by continuing to put out public releases that the district is cooperating fully yet giving the former kids no answers only makes matters worse. The documents I requested from Lake Bluff were severely redacted when it came to what the district actually discussed surrounding the incident involving me. What the document did show is the only thing they did in the summer of 1985 was contact their attorney and insurance agency. Then they let Ritz resign with pay the next fall. Even as recently as last month, Lake Bluff continued to refer to the incidents in question as "allegations." Well, Mr. Ritz pled guilty last week to masturbating in front of me and I would like Lake Bluff to stop calling them allegations.

There is an empathy piece sorely missing with cases like this and that should be corrected. It took an unbelievable amount of courage for Dave to come forward with this as I can assure you, we don't really want to be at a podium talking about this sort of thing. I don't know what the answer is. But there has to be a better way to deal with the victims.

1. Investigate this as a district.
2. Hire an independent investigator.
3. Show some compassion.

Above all else, if this former teacher was, in fact, doing inappropriate things - What can we do today to assure he has absolutely no contact with children? It seems, if nothing else, this is something everyone should be able to agree on.

Thank you.