

***An Attempt to Mend a Broken Network
& Save the Cause of Christ from Reproach***

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Tommy Shelton Victim: Duane Clem

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[Pastor Duane Clem issues his written statement. Read how Tommy Shelton used the trust young Duane had in him to manipulate Duane into allowing himself to be victimized.]

Pastor Duane Clem's written statement

----- Original Message -----

From: Duane Clem
Subject: My statement
Date: Sat, 20 Jan 2007 04:37:27 +0000

Gentlemen,

Here is the long awaited statement. You have my OK to use it in whatever way you feel necessary, and you may include my name. This has been extremely hard to do, but I think it had to be done.

--- statement follows ---

It has taken me a long time to get to the point where I felt I could write this. In light of recent events and allegations brought forth by other parties, I feel it has become necessary to compose this statement.

Let me begin by saying that I am not writing out of a spirit of vengeance or animosity. I had never planned on sharing what happened with anyone else. I was prepared to take this to my grave. I had forgotten, or at least pushed back, the feelings of shame and resentment I had about this situation, but in recent days a lot of that has been brought back. I do not, however, blame anyone who has been DIRECTLY affected by this for coming forward.

Tommy Shelton was my pastor for many years at the Ezra Church of God in West Frankfort, IL. I began attending with my mother, sister and two brothers around 1974 or so, and my father became a Christian and began coming with us shortly after I graduated from high school in 1984. Tommy and I were never really close until I began attending the Christian school our church operated. Over the next few years, we would spend a lot of time talking, as I was dealing with depression issues and he was counseling me.

When the General Assembly of the Church of God in Illinois decided to suspend Tommy's ministerial credentials in 1985, I was one of several who wrote a letter in his defense. I was also questioned by a detective at the West Frankfort Police Department. I had been on a few overnight trips with him, and gave testimony that nothing had happened that would substantiate the allegations being made against him. At the time, this was true. It was, unfortunately, about to change.

Sometime in late 1985 or early 1986, Tommy came to me and said he had an unusual medical problem and asked for my help. I was shocked. I had previously been told by two other young men that he had said the same thing to them, but I could not believe that they were telling me the truth, even though they told me identical stories at two different times. Now I was hearing these words from my pastor. I felt trapped. I wanted to say something right then, but I didn't. I had vigorously defended him against allegations in the past, and had even lost friends because of it. I had written a letter saying nothing had happened to me. I had told the police nothing happened. Now, here I was, 19 years old, with NO ONE I felt I could talk to about it.

Over the next few months, Tommy and I would meet at his house, the church, the original 3ABN building, and even one night on a back country road, anywhere he thought no one would see us. There was a lot of inappropriate touching, but nothing further. He wanted much more out of it, but I couldn't let it happen because in my heart I knew it wasn't right. I was wrestling with thoughts like "What if someone finds out? What will happen to the church ... his family ... my family? Who would believe me anyway?"

Whenever he would be touching me, I would get muscle spasms in my back. I guess it was because I was so tense. More than once he sensed that I was in pain, and a couple of times he even accused me of "faking it" because I didn't care or didn't want to help him. I really started questioning if I was in the wrong. It was constant mental and emotional turmoil.

On one occasion, I had been hired by a television and appliance rent-to-own company as an assistant manager, and was to travel to the main office about an hour away for two days of training. The company said they would get me a motel room so I wouldn't have to drive back and forth. When Tommy found this out, he decided that it would be a good opportunity for him to come down to my room and no one would ever know the difference. I paid very little attention to my training all day long because I was dreading what was going to happen that night. Finally, as the supervisor was going to reserve the room, I told him that "something had come up" and I was going to have to drive back home, so I wouldn't need the room after all. I lied. I don't remember what excuse I gave Tommy for not staying the night down there, but I know I lied to him also. I really didn't want to drive back and forth, but I hated the thought of another "meeting" worse. I loved my pastor and didn't want to hurt him, but I didn't know how much longer I could keep this up. I was now lying to try to avoid it.

Finally, he said he realized that I was uncomfortable and decided we shouldn't be doing this. It was like a thousand pound weight was gone. I felt free. The problem is that I felt such a release that I didn't consider the fact that this had already happened before, or so I had been told. I never told anyone. It is because of my silence, I feel, that others have been harmed. That is one of my big regrets and I will carry that guilt for the rest of my days. There is nothing I can ever do to change that. I only hope that in some way, speaking out now will help put an end to it once and for all.

I am happy to say that God has been with me through it all. I am still attending church faithfully, and have been working with teens at church for the past 10-12 years. I was ordained as a General Baptist minister in September of 2005, and have served as a youth pastor and Sunday School teacher at churches I have attended previously. I am pleased to be able to say that I do NOT have any homosexual desires or tendencies as a result of my experience. If anything, it has made me abhor and detest it even more than I ever did before. In addition, it is very possible that I will be dealing with a young person in the future facing similar issues, and God may have allowed me to go through this so I would know how to help them. All things DO work together for good to those who love God!

In conclusion, I want to say that I do NOT hate Tommy Shelton, nor do I want to see him or his family destroyed. I grew up with the Shelton kids. They're almost like family to me. I hope that my coming forward doesn't end our friendships, although I'm sure it will never be the same from this point forward.

I ask all who read this to please pray for all those who have been directly involved, our families, our churches and yes, for Tommy Shelton also. It is my opinion that he needs to be out of the ministry right now, but he also needs the Lord's leadership as he deals with past issues. Our God is a God of judgment, but He is also a God of forgiveness and restoration. I want that restoration for Tommy and everyone else who has been affected by this. Snide remarks and hateful comments won't solve anything or bring healing to anyone. Only God's touch can do that.

Thank you for your prayers and thoughts as we all try to put this behind us.
God bless.

Duane Clem

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