

Boarding School Under Fire for Half-Century of Abuse

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PHILADELPHIA (CN) – On the heels of a grand jury report chronicling a posh Pennsylvania boarding school’s entrenched culture of sexual abuse, a former Solebury School student claims in court that she lost her virginity to a gym teacher more than twice her age.

Filing suit in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas under a pseudonym, Jane Doe 1 says she is the only victim in Solebury’s long, sordid history who can still bring charges against the New Hope school under the criminal statute of limitations.

Doe’s Feb. 17 complaint came weeks after a grand jury in Bucks County released its report on what she calls Solebury’s routine, intentional and repeated failure “to protect its own students from predatory adults.”

A copy of the 48-page report from Feb. 1 is included as exhibit A to Doe’s complaint. It says that documented cases of Solebury students alleging sexual assault dated as far back as the 1950s.

The first accused teacher was “feebly” reprimanded by highers-up when they heard he was sleeping with a student, the complaint alleges. Doe says this reaction set the tone for over a half-century of “Solebury and its employees repeatedly look[ing] the other way while children were being victimized and suffering.”

“I’m 77, but I want [people] to understand that this has been with me my whole life,” one student who said she was abused in the 1950s told the grand jury.

This accuser says Solebury not only declined to look into her allegations when she came forward, it keeps her abuser’s two sons on its Board of Directors.

Recounting several shocking instances of assault, the report notes that one male student was “drugged and sodomized so savagely” by a teacher in an off-campus apartment “that he needed surgery to repair his rectum.”

Turning 30 this year, Doe says she was 15 when gym teacher Lyle Hazel began grooming her for an inappropriate sexual relationship.

He began by serenading her with love songs in the school gymnasium, and “obsessively” calling and texting Doe at all hours of the night, according to the complaint.

Doe says he then brazenly took her out on the town, trying to make her drink margaritas at the Copacabana and then tour Condom Kingdom for sex toys.

Though she resisted Hazel’s attempts to have her kiss him goodnight, Doe says this was the first of multiple dates the teacher had in store. It is even alleged that he took Doe to a faculty Christmas party. Doe says she soon began performing oral sex on the 35-year-old Hazel, and that he took her virginity one night at her mother’s house.

Doe says complaints to the administration by her friends and family went ignored. Meanwhile, Hazel’s wife allegedly began stalking Doe, targeting the student with a victim-shaming page on the social-media giant of the time, Myspace.

“No one at Solebury lifted a finger to protect this young woman, whose life was being destroyed by this deranged couple,” the complaint states.

Tom Wilschutz, the head of Solebury, said in the statement that he had yet to review Doe’s allegations, but that the school has been “vigilant in following [student-safety] policies and looking for additional areas of improvement.”

“I and the members of the faculty, administration and staff at Solebury School have made extensive efforts to ... strengthen our policies, procedures and training to ensure our students gain all of the benefits of a Solebury education in a safe and protective atmosphere,” added Wilschutz, who was not at Solebury at the time of Doe’s enrollment.

“We strive to move forward with openness and integrity for the victims of abuse, for our entire community and for this institution that we care for so deeply,” the statement continues.

Doe says she continued seeing the gym teacher for a time after she graduated, “unable to be free [from] Mr. Hazel’s obsessive controlling of her.”

Solebury kept Hazel on staff meanwhile until it “learned he embezzled \$4,000.00 worth of check,” the complaint states.

Doe says the school is unrepentant even in the face of the grand jury report.

“Instead of accepting responsibility, meaningfully improving its policies to ensure full protection of children or helping students heal for what has been done to them, Solebury, led by Mr. Wilschutz has engaged in a misleading public relations blitz to in a feeble attempt to distance the school from, and downplay, the sexual abuse and the permissive culture that made it likely,” the complaint states.

Doe says she is still considering bringing criminal charges. For now she wants punitive damages, accusing Solebury and Hazel, of Roebing, New Jersey, of negligence, corruption of a minor, childhood sexual abuse and various other counts.

The former student is represented in the suit by **Thomas Kline** of Kline & Specter and Jordan Merson of Merson Law.