



[Recent News](#)

[Top Stories](#)

[Arts & Entertainment \(https://www.independent.com/category/arts-entertainment/\)](#)

[Santa Barbara Continues Initiative for Complete Census Count](#)

(<https://www.independent.com/2019/07/23/santa-barbara-continues-initiative-for-complete-census-count/>)

By Blanca Garcia

(<https://www.independent.com/author/blanca-independent-com/>)

[Goleta Issues Three Thoughtful Proclamations](#)

(<https://www.independent.com/2019/07/23/goleta-issues-three-thoughtful-proclamations/>)

By Jean Yamamura

(<https://www.independent.com/author/jean-independent-com/>)

[Fig Mountain's Jim Dietenhofer Dies](#)

(<https://www.independent.com/2019/07/22/fig-mountains-jim-dietenhofer-dies/>)

By Indy Staff

(<https://www.independent.com/author/indystaff/>)

[Rep. Carbajal Holds Citizenship Ceremony at Library](#)

(<https://www.independent.com/2019/07/22/rep-carbajal-holds-citizenship-ceremony-at-library/>)

By Delaney Smith

(<https://www.independent.com/author/delaney-smith/>)

[County to Boost Red-Tag Criteria for Homes atop Isla Vista Cliffs](#)

(<https://www.independent.com/2019/07/19/county-to-narrow-red-tag-criteria-for-homes-atop-ista-vista-cliffs/>)

By Evelyn Spence

(<https://www.independent.com/author/evelyn-spence/>)

Memories of Better Days Persist

Clergy Sexual Abuse and the Healing Process

When I first arrived in Santa Barbara in 2003, and began working on reconciliation issues, many former students of Saint Anthony's Seminary contacted me with specific requests. Most of these inquiries came from men who had suffered harm during their time at the school and who felt the need to speak with another survivor about what had happened to them. As one former seminarian explained, it was about sharing "a common wound."



Paul Fericano

Some called or emailed me, curious about their offender, where he was living, and how he was being monitored. Others asked if I could visit a particular spot on the grounds that held certain memories for them. Many had not set foot on the property since their student days decades before, and most were reluctant or unable to return to the school.

The ghosts of our past were everywhere on that campus. But some survivors realized they could still walk the halls again, see the places and objects that haunted their lives, and revisit the past through me, another survivor, if I was willing and able. And I was. Their requests represented a deep longing to find the missing parts of a puzzle that I myself was just beginning to piece together.

Finding a Safe Haven

Although the seminary had officially closed in 1987, it was still an active campus in 2003, home to both the Waldorf and Santa Barbara Middle schools. It would eventually be sold to the San Roque Charitable Trust in 2005, and resurrected in its present incarnation as the Garden Street Academy. But for two brief years, the seminary grounds were still relatively open. Thanks to the understanding of two friars in charge at the time, who were former alumni of Saint Anthony's Seminary themselves and supporters of my work, I was given unprecedented access to the main building, chapel and tower. I would eventually visit every locked room in that ancient three-story structure, including the basement, the attic, and the old cloister area where the friars had once slept.

Much of the same furniture, books, files, wall hangings, and objects of various kinds – from kitchen utensils to biology lab jars – could be found there intact. It was like slipping through a small crack in time. And it was during this period that my visits became part of my own healing journey.

I took advantage of a rare opportunity to reclaim integral parts of my broken past. I slept in the single beds that still occupied the cavernous freshman dorm on the top floor; I sat at the heavy plank dining room tables where hundreds of us shared meals; I played the grand piano that still occupied the music room; and I even spent considerable time in the very room of my offender where I and so many other boys were abused.

No one ever asked me to take any photographs of the places I was visiting, and I never offered. I sensed it was my personal observations and feelings that mattered more than any fixed snapshot. My voice over the phone or my words in an email helped describe what others had replayed so many times in their own minds. I made numerous trips to offenders' rooms and to other areas on the campus where abuse was known or alleged to have occurred. It was an intense and humbling experience, visiting the dark places that others could not. Memories pursued me as I sat alone in the chapel, climbed the iron stairs to the top of the 140-foot tower, or stepped onto a once noisy and crowded baseball field.

I also spent days in the old freshman study hall reviewing past issues of the *Antonian*, the student magazine first published in the '20s, searching for traces of information buried in obscure articles that someone hoped I might locate.

It was on just such an occasion that my notions of healing were tested and transformed. It occurred one morning when I was asked to pay a visit to the student barbershop in the basement of the seminary. The unexpected rush of memories that day forever altered my perception of suffering and helped to boost my tired spirit.

I had been asked by a survivor to determine if a particular "mark" that he once made was still on one of the walls there. He spoke about how his offender had physically beaten him one day in the basement laundry room for talking back and defying him. Immediately afterward, he walked alone to the barbershop which he considered his safe haven. Once there, he sat on the floor and used a pocket knife to carve the initials "M.G." deep into the bottom of a corner wall near the door. Now, and after all these years, he wanted to find out if those initials were still there. "I know it sounds weird," he told me, "but I need to know if I was ever in that room."

He didn't explain anything more about it, and I didn't ask. I had known this survivor, somewhat, when we were both students. He was in the class ahead of me. I was aware that his name didn't match the initials he said he carved into the barbershop wall, but this was none of my business. Like all the other requests I received, this one was deeply personal, and I never questioned it.

Best Bets

Event calendar sponsored by:



PAWS to Read

(<https://www.independent.com/events/paws-to-read-10-4/>)

(<https://www.independent.com/events/paws-to-read-10-4/>)

TUE, JUL 23 4:00 PM
Goleta



Bilingual Storytime

(<https://www.independent.com/events/bilingual-storytime-2-4/>)

(<https://www.independent.com/events/bilingual-storytime-2-4/>)

TUE, JUL 23 4:00 PM
Goleta



Music Academy of the West

(<https://www.independent.com/events/music-academy-of-the-west-festival-artist-series-presents-schubert-string-quintet/>)

(<https://www.independent.com/events/music-academy-of-the-west-festival-artist-series-presents-schubert-string-quintet/>)

TUE, JUL 23 7:30 PM
Santa Barbara

Add Event

(<https://www.independent.com/create-event/>)

Full Calendar (<https://www.independent.com/events/>)

I don't know how or why I had missed exploring the barbershop until that day. Looking back, I believe I was so focused on the seminary shadows that I felt drawn to the dark areas. The pull I sensed as I walked the grounds of Saint Anthony's and wandered from room to room had more to do with the bad things that had happened and little or nothing to do with anything good I may have experienced. It was as if I couldn't possibly risk betraying my own pain.

The seminary basement was a long, dark subterranean room deep beneath the seminary. Its wide center hallway stretched the entire length of the main building with several locked rooms on either side, most of which were used for storage. But along with the student barbershop and laundry room, the basement was also where the weight room, the biology labs, and the main bathrooms were located. When I opened the door to the barbershop that morning, I remember being startled by the distinct and pungent smell of hair tonics and soaps long gone from this place.

I quickly found the general area by the door that the survivor had spoken of. Getting down on my knees, and with the aid of a flashlight, I looked for and felt with my fingers the spot he described. It was obvious that the walls had been painted more than once over the years. But not nearly enough to obscure the deep grooves I found there that clearly revealed the initials "M.G." exactly where the survivor said they'd be. As I marveled at this discovery, a peculiar sensation surged through my body as if I had been jolted with tiny needles. I sat upright, smiling, and knew right then and there who "M.G." referred to.

Staying in Touch

Marius (Martin) Gates, OFM, was the new Spanish teacher at Saint Anthony's who joined the faculty in 1965, the same year I arrived my freshman year. (He would later reclaim his baptismal name and be known as "Marty."). He was not just my ideal of a true Franciscan but someone I hoped to emulate if I ever became a priest.

I wasn't the only one who felt this way. Every boy at the seminary recognized the goodness in this man. That quality couldn't be mistaken for anything else. But he was a particular friend and inspiration to my class.

We were the youngest students in the school, and he was the youngest teacher on the staff. St. Anthony's was his first assignment since being ordained two years before, and our class claimed him as one of its own. Marty did nothing to discourage the adoption.

Get News In Your Inbox

Sign Up



Marty Gates, OFM

Paul Fericano

He was young, handsome and energetic. Moreover, he was kind and understanding and could relate to young boys, most of us homesick half the time, in ways that few other friars could. He had a quick sense of humor and even joked how he could pass for one of us, being just five feet, six inches tall. If I loved the Franciscans in those days, and I did, it was because I loved Marty.

The barbershop felt like a safe haven for many of us because of this simple friar. It was often referred to as *his* barbershop after he single-handedly restored it to its previous glory, applying fresh paint, a black-and-white tile floor, bright curtains, and two newly upholstered barber chairs. He even installed a radio so we could listen to Dodger games.

Marty was a 1956 graduate of Saint Anthony's who learned to cut hair in this same room. Sitting on the floor now, it was easy for me to recall the day he cut my hair, a cigarette dangling from his lips, explaining how he needed to train a couple of freshmen to be student barbers and asking if I would be interested. He was quick to mention that it was the only job that paid students a small stipend each month. I jumped at the chance. Although I didn't know it at the time, Marty knew my parents were struggling to pay my tuition each month and that I had very little spending money. It wasn't until years later that I discovered he was born into poverty and raised by a single mother who, according to a family member, possessed a "servant heart." It was no surprise that Marty would end up devoting his life to serving the poorest people in this country and in Mexico.

Marty left teaching after that first year and became the pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Phoenix, Arizona, a tiny church in one of the city's most disadvantaged neighborhoods. He was faithful about staying in touch with me, especially after I left the seminary during my sophomore year. In the summer of 1968 before the start of my senior year in high school, he invited me to come to Phoenix for six weeks and help run a summer school program for the children of Hispanic and Native American families. He was in his element doing what he loved.

When I arrived he told me how he always enjoyed being a student at Saint Anthony's but that he never felt comfortable as a teacher. It was here, he said, among the poorest of the poor, that he felt like a teacher who had returned as a student. When I left Phoenix that year, I was reinvigorated by Marty's vision and commitment.

When he died in 2000 at the age of 64 after suffering a stroke, Marty Gates had been living and working for more than 30 years at Casa Franciscana in Guaymas, Mexico, a Franciscan center for the poor that he helped establish. This simple follower of Saint Francis of Assisi was the real deal. In 1992, several years before his death, I wrote to tell him about my abuse. He was devastated by the news. His letter back to me was the most compassionate pastoral response I ever received from any member of the clergy. In it, Marty spoke of his deep sorrow for what had happened to me and attempted to mask his anger for my offender, Mario Cimmarrusti. In one part he revealed the following:

The irony does not escape me. I once took the name of 'Marius' and happily served side by side with my brother who took the similar name of 'Mario.' Together we were the same. Separately we couldn't have been more different. I am struggling with the crime he has committed and wish to offer you what I can to help you find some peace.

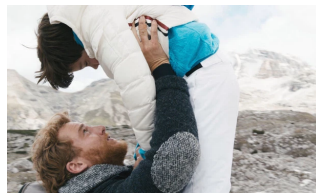
Sitting on the floor of the barbershop that day, I came to realize how necessary it was for me to remember all the good I had taken away with me from the seminary. It was a mistake not to acknowledge the healthy relationships I had developed and natural interactions I had encountered. By denying and even ignoring them, I had become a threat to my own healing and was allowing any good experiences I might have had to be overrun by the bad. It wasn't about having it one way or the other. All of it needed to be embraced.

When I finally spoke again with the survivor who carved those initials in the barbershop wall so long ago in 1965, he sounded relieved to learn that his secret handiwork had survived all those years. "Memories of better days persist," he said, knowing that some things in our past are not impossible to retrieve and hold on to.

A Room with a Pew reflects the experiences, observations, and opinions of a survivor of clergy abuse who attended St. Anthony's Seminary in the 1960s. Author Paul Fericano helped cofound [SafeNet \(http://www.mysafenet.org\)](http://www.mysafenet.org) in 2003 and returned to Santa Barbara that year to assist the community in recovery. As a poet, writer, and activist engaged in the healing process, the author often challenges survivors (and others) to look for humor in the shadows.

♡ Add to Favorites

More Like This



([https://www.independent.com/2019/03/28/when-independent.com/](https://www.independent.com/2019/03/28/when-independent.com/2019/03/28/when-independent.com/) peaks-slow-but-engaging/)

(<https://www.independent.com/2019/03/28/when-independent.com/> beths-to-rock-soho/)