

Walter Robinson's Remarks Honoring Bob Sherman

New England Legal Awards, Sept. 21, 2023

To the Lifetime Achievement award winners who expressed concern that the award means their careers are nearing an end: In my business, I got the same awards 10 to 15 years ago. And I'm still here.

For me, it's better to follow Bob Sherman than to precede him. Bob lavished praise on the Spotlight Team for the work we did uncovering the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests. I would like to refute some of what Bob said.

During all my years at the Globe, many people I met said they assumed I knew what's going on. But that's not true. I only know what people tell me.

Which brings me to Bob. In 2001, the Globe's new editor, Marty Baron, asked the Spotlight Team to find out what the Archdiocese knew about one serial child abuser, Father John Geoghan.

We had a laser-like focus on Geoghan. That is, until I met with Bob and his partner Eric MacLeish, on the Friday afternoon before 9/11. Geoghan, Bob told me, was the tip of a very large iceberg. An iceberg, he said, involving the crimes of scores of priests, that had been covered up by the Church for decades. That meeting, and Bob's substantial help in the months that followed, changed the course of our investigation.

Four months later, we broke the story about Geoghan. But we also reported that the Boston Archdiocese had made secret settlements involving more than 100 priests. Months later, Atty. Gen. Tom Reilly forced the Archdiocese to turn over all of its personnel records. The tally: Nearly 250 Boston Archdiocese priests had sexually molested children.

Prying open Pandora's Box here in Boston has led to a continuing cascade of horrific revelations across the United States and around the world - as you know.

You might not have known how important and courageous a role Bob played in our work.

There's scarcely anyone involved in Democratic politics, in Massachusetts and nationally, who doesn't know how important Bob's wisdom and support have been. And as I discovered when I spoke in Lisbon four years ago, Bob and his wife, Kim Sawyer, are beloved in Portugal for the work they both did when Bob was the American ambassador there during the Obama Administration.

Back in 2002, the Spotlight Team published a book, "Betrayal: Crisis in the Catholic Church." Several years ago, I signed the book for Bob. I wrote: "To my good friend Bob Sherman, without whom this would be a book of blank pages."

In my 51 years at the Globe, this is the only time I've outed a source. In this case, Bob, I only wish I'd done it sooner. Thank you for all you've done.