

BOOK WORLD

Into the Woods

THE TRICKY PART
One Boy's Fall
From Trespass Into Grace
 By Martin Moran
 Beacon. 285 pp. \$23.95

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"Sexual molestation of children, particularly of boys by men, is a silenced plague in our culture, because men can't be victims; they can't admit it has happened to them and we can't admit it has happened to our men." This quote comes not from "The Tricky Part" but from "Never Let Me Go," by Chuck Rosenthal, published last year. Both are marvelous, courageous and above all thoughtful memoirs by middle-aged men who have chosen to share the complex tales of their abuse as children — of how it affected them as they tried to grow up, tried to be good and decent men. Both take place in a Catholic context. Both are ridden with despair and guilt and with sad, choked affection.

The cover picture of "The Tricky Part" is almost too much to bear. It shows little Marty Moran standing up in a kayak, out on a camping excursion. He holds his paddle above his head in a gesture of triumph; he's smiling to beat the band. He's wearing a life preserver, but his emotional life already has been destroyed; he's on this trip with Bob, an unmarried 30-year-old pedophile who used to be a Catholic camp counselor and may once have been a seminarian. Marty's parents have approved this outing with Bob — as they will continue to do for years — and by the time he's 15, Marty will have learned more about coercion, sex, illicit excitement, deceit and sorrow than most people will in a lifetime. All this happens against a background of suffering plaster saints, a great-aunt who is a contemplative nun and a mother whose idea of small talk goes something like this: "I can tell you one thing. . . . I'd rather find out one of my children was dead than homosexual."

The trouble is: We know how to talk about the sexual victimization of women; we see it all the time in movies and billboards and



Broadway. He finds a terrific young man and moves in with him.

After their initial shock, Marty's parents get used to his sexual orientation. So everything should be fine, right? But Marty's emotional and physical wiring has been utterly warped by his childhood predator. Wholesome sex is swell, perfectly swell, but for him, if it isn't perverted, sick, sad, riddled with danger, degradation and guilt, it isn't really sex. He becomes a hopeless sex addict.

The last third of this memoir chronicles the author's earnest, diligent, sometimes desperate efforts to get back on an even keel, to claim his fair share of human happiness. He never condemns the man who abused him, although he does finally confront him. Their conversation is unutterably sad, and the word "love" is mentioned — by the old man, now an invalid in a veterans' hospital.

There have probably been more lies told over the long years of human history about sex than about anything else. The metaphor of war is often deeply embedded in our physical transactions. In my experience, men and women think differently about sex. We impose any number of laws and attitudes upon this mysterious set of acts to control our impulses.

Martin Moran was a victim of a man who couldn't control those impulses, and it almost ruined a boy's life. But it didn't. Moran's courage was immeasurable, and it should be an inspiration to those children, who — by the worst set of circumstances — find themselves in similar situations.

Congressman Sued for Million

Rep. Don Sherwood (R-Pa.) is in the seat. A Rockville woman filed a lawsuit against the 64-year-old congressman Wednesday alleging he repeatedly pursued and choked her during their "five-year intimate relationship."

Cynthia Ore says in the suit that after an "unprovoked and vicious attack" Sherwood promised he wouldn't do it again and her not to leave him. Ore, 29, is asking \$5.5 million in compensatory and punitive damages.

In the lawsuit, Ore says she lived with Sherwood in a Washington apartment most of their relationship and was repeatedly promised that he would marry her and have a family. Sherwood is married and has two daughters.

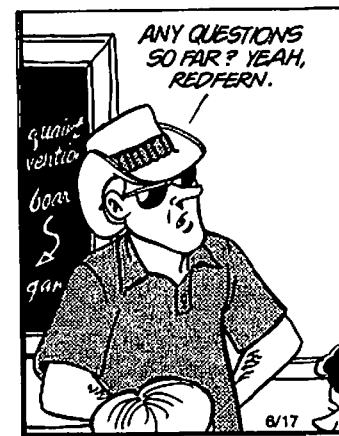
Sherwood's attorney Bobby R. Bure released a statement yesterday saying "Congressman Sherwood emphatically denies that he ever physically abused Ore in any way, at any time." The statement said the suit was "plainly intended to be a lucrative and unjustified settlement

The Oratorical Course

Dinner theater? Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) gave an impromptu speech to sixth-graders at a Washington restaurant Tuesday night. Roberta Keis, a teacher at Quogue School in New York, told The Washington Post yesterday that her students were visiting the nation's capital as part of their history and dinner at Georgia Brown's was their final stops.

One government-savvy student read the senator and a note was sent over the table requesting a visit. The 43-year-old Obama, who was dining with his uncle Kenya, took a break from his meal of green tomatoes and pan-seared grouse

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discuss when the victim is a boy. Boys (and men) are supposed to be uncomplicatedly crazy about sex; to have sex, for them, is to "get lucky." Philip Roth built his career on that premise. British novels are full of same-sex boarding-school romances. But what happened to Marty was no romance, although it had a sexual dimension; it was often perpetrated against his will by a murky grown-up creep with a bad complexion. It was impossible to understand for a 12-year-old, except to know that it was utterly against the rules of his own church.

But what if the guy isn't a total creep? What if the rest of the time, he's teaching you whitewater rafting, and how to milk cows and drive tractors and sit around a campfire and sing? What if these perverts and fiends who prey on our young are human beings, only wired in a horrifyingly imperfect way? What if genuine affection is buried somewhere in the abusive physical exchange?

Marty soon realized he wasn't the only boy having sex with his grown-up friend. Bob later brought an actual girlfriend around so that they sometimes made up a (fairly depressing) sexual threesome. By this time, Marty was terrified that Bob would be found out. Who, then, would be blamed? And by this time — after three years — Marty was old enough to know that he had been shamefully used.

At around this point, Marty begins the heroic life's work of getting out of the mess he's been trapped in. His first step, tellingly, is to leave his oppressive, all-male Catholic high school and transfer to a more public, neutral school. By now he figures he's gay and probably always has been. But because life can be kind, he falls in with some cheerful drama majors and discovers he has a fine singing voice. After college, he goes to New York and makes a very respectable career on and off

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