

# Decades-old sexual abuse comes to light

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## Silver Lake Mennonite Camp comes to grips with allegations by former ‘camp kid’

August 24, 2018 | [Web First](#)

Dave Rogalsky | Eastern Canada Correspondent



Photo courtesy of Silver Lake Mennonite Camp

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Ruth-Ann Klassen Shantz has a long history with Silver Lake Mennonite Camp in Sauble Beach, Ont., and a story she has kept long hidden. But earlier this year she shared with the camp’s board of directors her allegations of long-term sexual abuse by a former camp director.

Describing herself as a “camp kid” in her “My voice” statement posted on Silver Lake’s website ([slmc.ca/statements](https://slmc.ca/statements)), she recalls turning 12 the year Lawrence Pentelow became camp director,

a position he held from 1978 to 1987. “Lawrence quickly became part of my world. He knew me well. I trusted him. My family trusted him,” Shantz writes, adding, “The years of grooming and sexual abuse by Lawrence robbed me of what camp was meant to be for me and, more importantly, robbed me of who I was meant to be.”

In spite of her claims of abuse, which are alleged to have happened over many years at the camp and elsewhere, and which are named in her online statement, Shantz went on to serve at Silver Lake as counsellor, summer staff, board member, board chair, and a volunteer at work weekends for 20 years.

In her own words, she says, “I have spent my whole life denying the depth of my pain because I did not want the truth to hurt anyone else. My inability to ask for help when I was 17 years old was deeply rooted in my desire to spare both the people and the institutions I loved.”

“So why now?” she asks. She says that she is choosing to not allow the abuse, which will always be a part of her, to define her: “This statement is about honouring my 17-year-old self and every other girl, daughter, mother or grandmother who has stayed silent. I cannot recapture those lost years when I chose silence and protecting others. It has taken me 35 years to choose me. It does not matter what your circumstances are in life or who has created them. Please choose you. Always choose you. It has taken me a very long time to get this right.”

In email correspondence with *Canadian Mennonite*, Pamela Fehr, Silver Lake’s current board chair, writes, “Based on legal advice, [Silver Lake] did not investigate this matter, as it involved an individual who was last employed by [Silver Lake] over 30 years ago. It should be noted that upon receipt of the trespass notice, . . . Pentelow sent a number of unsolicited emails to Ruth-Ann in which he acknowledged wrongdoing in relationship to Ruth-Ann at a time when he was in a position of power and influence, and the very negative impact that wrongdoing has had on her.”

At Shantz’s request, the police were not contacted regarding these allegations.

CM contacted Pentelow in preparation for this article. After contacting legal counsel, he responded with three statements and requested that they be quoted in whole:

- It is with deep sadness that I write knowing that many lives are affected by these words.
- I apologize to Ruth-Ann for the stress and pain caused to her as a result of our relationship.
- I acknowledge the proactive work that the board of directors of Silver Lake Mennonite Camp is doing as a result of this situation.

The Silver Lake board has been working in response to Shantz’s allegations. In a recent press release, the camp lists a number of initiatives:

- First, it issued a private trespass notice to Pentelow, banning him from the camp and camp events.
- Even though Silver Lake has “policies and procedures related to workplace practices and issues of harassment and sexual violence,” they were reviewed, “seeking counsel and input to ensure they meet best practices and are broadly known and understood by staff.”
- Then the camp also took the “opportunity to develop a new training curriculum not only for our own staff, but also available to the broader camping community.” According to Fehr, this material is being developed with Carol Penner, the coordinator of Applied Studies at

Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ont., who developed the “Sacred trust” material on church and sexual abuse for Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. The camp’s material, which is “primarily scenario based,” is still in draft form, although it is now being finalized after a pilot project in the spring. Silver Lake plans to release it together with MC Eastern Canada to any camps in Ontario and beyond that are interested in it.

Silver Lake’s press release ends by saying, “The board remains fully committed to the safety of all its community members, and welcomes your prayers at this difficult time. We are driven by a vision of positive, open Christian community, and saddened at its failures for Ruth-Ann.” Anyone with comments, concerns or questions is asked to contact Pamela Fehr by email at [board@slmc.ca](mailto:board@slmc.ca). The statement and news release can be viewed at <http://slmc.ca/contact/governance/statements/>.

See also *[“Broken boundaries”](#)*



Photo courtesy of Silver Lake Mennonite Camp

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## Comments

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**Lawrence Pentalow**

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Submitted by Barbra Graber on Sun, 2018-08-26 18:30

Deep thanks to you, Ruth-Ann Klassen Shantz, for coming forward to stand tall and name who harmed you, thereby claiming a new level of healing for yourself and warning others of the risk Pentelow poses. You are not alone. And Pentelow should never again hold a position of authority over young persons in any setting.

Thank you, Canadian Mennonite, for your in-depth reporting. As a survivor and ally to many survivors, I have three suggestions to make your report an even more effective strategy for making it safer for victims to come forward: 1) always include a photo of a named perpetrator so there is no chance of mistaken identity and opportunity for certain recognition and 2) always include an invitation for others with more information on Pentelow or any offending church leader to report to civil authorities or outside, independent agencies or groups. This gives others permission. 3) Encourage your readers to pass along documented reports on church leader offenders to the Mennonite Abuse Prevention List.

The plague of sexual abuse among Anabaptist Mennonites will not end until 17-year-olds no longer have to wait for decades to feel safe enough to report it. It will not happen until adults are educated to be able to suspect and take action to stop a grooming process before another young life is derailed. Barbra Graber, SNAP Survivors Network/Mennonite, 540-214-8874, [mennonite@snapnetwork.org](mailto:mennonite@snapnetwork.org)

## Sexual abuse

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Submitted by Durrell Bowman on Mon, 2018-08-27 09:00

I find it impossible to believe that Dave Rogalsky chose to quote Ruth-Ann Klassen Shantz's sexual abuser, Lawrence Pentelow, as to their "relationship," when the details she conveyed (which you do not quote) make it perfectly clear that Pentelow had all of the power and crossed all kinds of lines. Apparently, after more than thirty years, he still has enough power for you to have believed there was a "relationship," whereas everything Ruth-Ann says in her statement (in quite a lot of detail) is "alleged." This should have been an astoundly-powerful, Mennonite, "Me-Too" moment for every reader of your publication, but, instead, you failed--epically.

## Response to Durrell Bowman

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Submitted by Ginny Hostetler on Tue, 2018-08-28 10:45

If an accusation is made against someone who is named, good journalistic practice indicates that person must be given a chance to respond to the charges. Readers will interpret his comments and note what he does and does not say. Readers can read the full, unedited statement by Ruth-Ann by clicking on the link in the second paragraph.  
–Canadian Mennonite

## Sexual Abuse

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Submitted by Schelley Hiebert on Tue, 2020-09-15 12:57

Ruth-Ann, thank you for your courage and leadership. I continue to feel profoundly moved by your strength and grace (2 years later).

Durrell, you nailed it. We will never move forward if we continue to give power and strength to the predators.

Many thanks,  
Schelley Hiebert

## My Mother's Voice

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Submitted by Benjamin Daniel Shantz on Tue, 2018-08-28 00:20

Dear Canadian Mennonite:

Last year my Mom, Ruth-Ann Klassen Shantz shared with my brother Jon and I a story that she had held onto for over 30 years. It was a story about a place that we loved, where we had made some of our best friends, and that my Mom had been involved in for as long as we could remember. It was actually where my parents met. It devastated us to find out that the same place that nourished our faith and friendships had failed her so many years ago. From the age of 17-20 my Mom was sexually abused by the director of the Camp, a man who was married with children.

It has been a very challenging year for my Mom. I cannot imagine how difficult it has been for her to bring forward such a traumatic experience such as this. She has made the brave choice to name herself and talk about her experience. She has done so with the hopes that others will one day find the courage to do the same.

When I found out that the Canadian Mennonite was going to be writing an article based on her statement (attached below) I was very excited. These are the things a Church that prides itself on social justice and non-violence should be addressing. After reading the article I was embarrassed for my Church community. The CM had a chance to say something meaningful, to make a powerful statement, to communicate one Woman's story and make room for many others'. Instead my Mother was silenced again.

First off, the article is written by an older white man. Someone belonging to a very powerful demographic within Church and Society, the same as the demographic of her abuser. It may not have hurt for CM to have chosen a Woman to write this article.

The article tiptoes around my Mother's experiences calling them 'alleged' 'claims' and includes only part of her statement and yet the full words of her abuser. My mother was consulted before the article was released, she made many edits, but was told that nothing could change unless there were any new 'facts'. All the facts that were needed were included in her statement which the CM had full access to. This article seems to be doing the same thing that was done to my mother so long ago by her abuser. Protect institutions at the cost of the victim. This is something the Mennonite church has become all too good at and escaping this reality is the point that this article should have made.

Thanks,  
Benjamin Daniel Shantz

## **Benjamin,**

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Submitted by Ginny Hostetler on Tue, 2018-08-28 11:10

Benjamin,

We respect your mother Ruth-Ann for her courage to bring to light hurtful actions that happened in her past. There has been no attempt to silence her by *Canadian Mennonite*, rather to help her tell her story. We encourage people to read the entire statement, linked in the second paragraph.

Part of our due diligence as journalists is to ask the accused person to respond, given that he has not been charged or found guilty by a court. Readers will interpret his comments and note what he does and does not say.

We encourage conversations about sexual abuse to continue in the church and its institutions. We encourage people who may have experienced abuse to come forward with their stories, to call for accountability, and to seek healing. We respect the board of Silver Lake for how they handled these allegations. We wish Ruth-Ann well in her ongoing healing.

–Executive Editor Ginny Hostetler for *Canadian Mennonite*

## Support for our friend

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Submitted by Doreen,Dale,Marie,Clare on Wed, 2018-09-05 16:31

We have known Ruth-Ann Klassen Shantz for 20 years as a strong, confident woman, not knowing that underneath she was trapped in the living hell of a traumatized teen.

We have supported Ruth-Ann as she chose to make her account of grooming and sexual abuse public, to encourage others to break the silence that the perpetrator skillfully manipulates in his victims. We have been privy to emails and documents along the way which we hold in confidence.

This was not a relationship. This was sexual abuse! Pentelow was in a position of power, and was married with a family. Ruth-Ann was a minor. We are in agreement with the suggestion of Barbra Graber to have a photo of the perpetrator included with the story, along with an invitation for others to come forward and a list of resources available to survivors.

We applaud Silver Lake Camp for honouring her story, providing support, updating its policies and developing an educational program.

We have great empathy for all families who are themselves victims of the secrecy and manipulation of a perpetrator, someone they have known and loved as quite a different person. However, we believe that in order to stop the abuse, these important stories must be told, so that victims can seek help without having to suffer for decades, so that the rest of us have greater understanding of the pain they are suffering, and so that perpetrators know their despicable behaviour will not be tolerated.

We applaud Ruth-Ann for her strength and courage to speak her truth and break the decades of silence. It is a sacred privilege to walk with her on this journey. We know that one day she will not just survive, but she will thrive.

Doreen & Dale Good; Marie & Clare Jantzi

## Editorial failure

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Submitted by Trevor Bechtel on Thu, 2018-09-13 22:05

I believe that the Canadian Mennonite did not attempt to silence anyone in this case just as they did not seek to privilege heteronormative voices in publishing that horrible advertisement earlier this year. However, the offenses committed by Rogalsky in writing the piece, which are strongly amplified by Hostetler's defensiveness, show clearly the Canadian Mennonite's commitment to tone deaf journalism and the protection of institutions at all costs, even when those institutions recognize more of their culpability than the CM does.

The appeal to journalistic practice entirely uninformed by the welter of recent sexual abuse reporting simply suggests the need for significant reform.

## **Thank you for your courage, Ruth-Ann**

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Submitted by Angela Hovey on Tue, 2018-09-18 21:41

Ruth-Ann, thank you for your courage! In many ways as I write this, my words feel so trite ... but I want to express that you sharing your painful experience is important to me. I also believe it is invaluable to the many victims who continue to carry their pain and burden of the abuse in isolation. As I reflect on my own time as a previous camper for many years and a counsellor for only one summer during Pentelow's tenure at SLMC, I wonder how many others may have been targeted and abused, and suffered silently and alone. My work with survivors and perpetrators of sexual abuse has taught me that most perpetrators have more than one victim. I hope other victims/survivors will be able to draw from your tremendous courage.

## **Talking about abuse**

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Submitted by Kirsten Freed on Wed, 2018-09-26 20:18

How we talk about abuse has ramification not only to the people involved in a particular situation, but to all people who have experienced abuse as well as those who will in the future. A reading of the recent article and subsequent editorial about sexual abuse experienced at a Mennonite camp at the hands of the Camp Director Lawrence Pentelow left the impression that something not nice may or may not have happened a long time ago. Having already read Ruth-Ann Klassen Shantz's public statement of her experiences of sexual abuse, it was very difficult to understand why the Canadian Mennonite chose such a nonchalant tone in the original article, and also why they chose to defend it in a



later editorial. As individuals and as church institutions we need to do better than this, for the safety and well-being of our most vulnerable.

Kirsten Freed (former Silver Lake camper, former fellow congregant of Ruth-Ann)