Pain of abuse killed Emma

Spectre of evil priest haunted her to the end

A FAMILY's brave battle to save a child sexually abused by a priest ended tragically last week with the death of the Melbourne woman.

Emma Foster, 26, died alone on her bedroom floor clutching her teddy bear, a treasured first birthday present from her parents.

It was a tragic end to a life shattered by abuse by the family's parish priest.

For 13 years, Emma's parents, Anthony and Christine, battled to keep their eldest daughter alive as she rode a roller-coaster of drugs and self-destructive behaviour.

Last Sunday, they were told Emma had died of a suspected drug overdose.

"Over the past days we have experienced grief like we could never possibly imagine or have predicted," Mr Foster said.

Emma and younger sister Katie were victims of Father Kevin O'Donnell as students at Sacred Heart Primary School, Oakleigh, from 1988 to 1993.

O'Donnell served 15 months' jail after pleading guilty to indecently assaulting a boy and one girl, aged eight to 14, between 1946 and 1977. He died after his release in 1997.

Katie, 22, turned to alcohol to dull memories of her abuse and was hit by a drunk driver in 1999, leaving her with intellectual and physical disabilities.

O'Donnell was not charged with offences against Emma and Katie but the Catholic Church paid the family a confidential six-figure settlement.

"He could walk in there any time, any class, any day and take whatever child he liked... to a secluded spot," Mrs Foster said.

I felt so stupid that I thought these men were next to God and he's been having sex with kids for 50 years."

Emma's parents found out when she was 12.

"It seemed when she read about his offences in the local paper of March, 1995 it hit her that that is what happened to her and she became anorexic and went into an adolescent psych unit in September of that year," Mrs Foster said.

Mr Foster said his daughter was a caring and vibrant person.

"It was just overshadowed by what happened to her and it was too heavy for her to bear," he said.

Emma tried heroin at 17 and went on to use several illicit and prescription drugs.

"It made her forget things, took the pain away," Mr Foster said.

Mr Foster said the family was "going to suffer a lot of pain, but we're not going to let him take away our life or our good memories of Emma."

Emma's funeral will be on Tuesday at Boyd Chapel, Springvale Botanical Cemetery, at 10.30am. Instead of flowers, the family has asked for donations to Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse.

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Tragedy: En Foster, 26, d of a suspecte drug overdose after being abused by Catholic priest Father Kevin O'Donnell, le Far left, Anthony and Christine Foster with daughters Aimee and Katie.
Inquiry looms as more suicides linked to sexual abuse by Catholic priests
Mother can't forget the day she lost her beautiful boy

Hindsight and maternal intuition pointed to Helen Watson's last visit to her home in 1975. The woman she had known all her life had transformed. She had been identified as a bright student. Her mother was proud of her as she loved her upbringing. Ms Watson always recalls the day her son was born in 1975 and his young brother, Jim, ticked off all the requirements of the Church. The boys were always in the backyard with their dogs and cats, playing football or cricket. She was a family friend, with a loving spirit, but now she is not. The family is still mourning the loss of their son.

Carroll continued, 'She was a bright student and a great upbringing. Ms Watson always recalls the day her son was born in 1975 and his young brother, Jim, ticked off all the requirements of the Church. The boys were always in the backyard with their dogs and cats, playing football or cricket. She was a family friend, with a loving spirit, but now she is not. The family is still mourning the loss of their son.'
Church's suicide v

Police link at least 40 deaths to clergy
Pressure grows on Baillieu to launch inquiry

EXCLUSIVE

By NICK MCKENZIE
RICHARD BAKER
and JANE LEE

CONFIDENTIAL police reports have detailed the suicides of at least 40 people sexually abused by Catholic clergy in Victoria, and have urged a new inquiry into these and many other deaths suspected to be linked to abuse in the church.

In a damning assessment of the church's handling of abuse issues, the reports say it appears the church has known about a shockingly high rate of suicides and premature deaths but has chosen to remain silent.

Written by Detective Sergeant Kevin Carson, the reports state that while conducting lengthy inquiries into paedophile clergy, investigators have discovered an inordinate number of suicides which appear to be a consequence of sexual offending.

The number of people contacting this office to report members of their family who they in the years following sexual assault by Catholic fraternity.

The report links at least 40 suicides to the sexual abuse perpetrated by a small number of paedophile clergy, including Gerard Ridsdale, Bryan Coffey, Paul Ryan, Robert Best and Edward Dowlan.

One of the reports includes a list of victims' names, dates of births, manner of death and the locations where the abuse is suspected or known to have taken place, including St Leo's primary school in Box Hill, St Joseph's in Geelong and St Alipius in Ballarat East.

Among those named as suicide victims are brothers Damien and Noel Walsh, and their cousin Martin Walsh. Another brother, Rob Walsh, who was also sexually abused by Best and Ridsdale and testified against them in court, told The Age last night that an inquiry was needed because of "the church's disregard for the law and disregard for victims".

Most of the victims, who include a student who was dux of his school, were abused between