

Accuser: Shanley said no one would believe me

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Week after week, from the time he was 6 until he was 12, Paul Shanley's alleged victim sat in Sunday school, "waiting, dreading, afraid" of being raped by the priest in the bathroom, the rectory, even the church confessional, prosecutors said yesterday.

Not until Shanley left St. Jean's parish in Newton in January 1990 did the abuse end, Deputy First Assistant District Attorney Lynn Rooney told jurors. But the boy remained bound by a code of silence: "If you tell," Shanley allegedly told him, "no one will believe you."

On the first day of testimony in the defrocked priest's child-rape trial, Kathleen Bennett, a substitute Sunday school teacher at St. Jean's in the 1980s, described the children's reaction whenever he would "pop in."

"Oh, my God, the kids would just freeze," she said.

In his gray suit and glasses, Shanley sat impassively in Middlesex Superior Court yesterday, his 74th birthday.

For 20 years, Rooney said, the alleged victim, now a 27-year-old former military police officer kept silent, burying the memories "deep inside" until early 2002, when media reports about allegations a former classmate had made against Shanley caused them to "bubble to the surface" in a breakdown that ended the alleged victim's career. The Herald does not name alleged sexual assault victims.

Defense attorney Frank Mondano mocked the notion of repressed memories, calling it a "psychiatric quagmire" too unreliable to meet the standard of proof "beyond a reasonable doubt" that a criminal case requires.

"This case is . . . about two things," he told the panel of eight men and eight women, "old memories - and really, really old memories."

Mondano said he would point out inconsistencies in the alleged victim's own testimony, which he suggested the accuser fabricated in order to win a \$500,000 settlement in a negligence suit he and other alleged victims brought against the Archdiocese of Boston.