

ROSS GOLDSTEIN

March 8, 2013

Dear Members of the Friedman Case Review Panel,

I am writing this letter because I understand that the Panel will accept my written statement at this time.

It is my hope that this letter will serve as a way to address some fundamental problems with the investigation and prosecution – specifically my role in it. While I have always wanted to personally address the Panel, over the last six or eight months, the District Attorney's Office repeatedly rejected reasonable requests made by my previous attorney which would have created a respectful and safe haven for me to come forward to talk with the Panel about this case, which had such an enormous impact on me and nearly ended my life.

I want to emphasize that one of the main reasons that I am writing this letter to the Panel is that I do not want my choice to not appear in person or make myself available for any questioning to be seen in any way as an affirmation that my testimony in the grand jury in 1988 was truthful or voluntary; it was not truthful and it was not voluntary.

With respect to the facts, I want to clarify one important point: I am not a pedophile. I am sickened and horrified by the very idea of these kinds of crimes being done to anybody - especially children. What I need to emphasize is that I was never an assistant to Arnold or Jesse Friedman in their computer classes and I did not commit any crimes there. I did not witness Jesse or anyone else commit any crimes in the Friedman home with any computer student. My testimony before the grand jury was a result of tremendous and unrelenting pressure and intimidation by the police and district attorney's office - in which I was eventually coerced to lie about the crimes taking place in order to try to save myself and be granted the Y/O status deal that was being offered to me. It was the ONLY way I had to avoid the possibility of spending my entire adult life in jail if convicted by a jury.

For many months after I was arrested, I maintained my innocence and refused to cooperate with the investigation, until the pressure became so heavy that I felt like I had no other option but to cooperate with the police - even though I was innocent. They did a good job of destroying my identity and sense of self by forming a new image of me in the media as a guilty evil monster.

I remember my first interaction with the Nassau County Police Department Sex Crimes Unit (SCU). It was in the late spring of 1988, I was at my friend [REDACTED] house. I was

¹ I am using the first names of my friends [REDACTED] [REDACTED] to protect their privacy. If the Panel is unclear as to their identities, please contact my attorney and she will supply them to the Panel.

17 years old at the time. He noticed that for several days a brown car seemed to be following him. It turned out that the brown car was an unmarked police car. I believe that [REDACTED] was the person who gave my name and the names of my friends to the police. I believe he also told them that we were hanging around the computer classes. [REDACTED] lived with the Friedmans during the period that the sexual abuse allegations took place. I believe that he was the first person that the police questioned as a possible accomplice of Jesse and that they pressured him to cooperate with them. I was told sometime later that he left town in early July of 1988 for fear of being arrested as well.

One afternoon, that same brown car pulled into [REDACTED]'s driveway and two police officers came to the house to question him. They said that [REDACTED]'s name appeared on a list of students from the Friedman computer classes. [REDACTED] denied being a student. They said that they wanted to ask him a few simple questions and, since we were there too ([REDACTED] and we all happened to also know Jesse Friedman, they were going to ask us a few questions too. Soon it became clear to the police that I knew Jesse the best out of all of us. In actuality, however, I only knew Jesse for a short time, from November 1986 through June 1987, when I met him as a student after I was transferred to the Village School.

The police asked us a lot of questions. We were gathered together in the living room and [REDACTED]'s mother was present at the time. Among the questions that the police asked was if I ever saw any abuse of the kids or any drugs being used there or given to the kids. I said "NO".

I explained to them how I first met Jesse. I also explained the nature of our relationship: how Jesse and I had made a few recordings at the Village School together at the school's sound studio and that was basically what I was doing with him. I made it 100% clear at this point – in front of my three friends and [REDACTED]'s mother, that I had absolutely no involvement in the Friedman computer classes and that the few times that I saw any students at his house, I never saw any abuse of any kind.

I remember mentioning that I once saw a syringe in Jesse's drawer in his room but I remember being very clear in telling them that I never saw him use it or talk about using it. I mentioned that Jesse showed me one of his dad's pedophile magazines and that that was the weirdest most awful thing that I ever saw at his house.

The police asked [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] if they knew Jesse or went to the class with him and they both answered "no". One of them, and I am not sure which one, said "we'd see him only when Ross was hanging out with him".

The police said "thank you all very much for letting us talk with you - we really do appreciate it" and then they left. I remember that we all felt a sense of relief when they left. I don't think any of us thought twice that the police might need to talk with any of us ever again.

A few weeks later, my second interaction with them was dramatically different and clearly marked the beginning of the end of my life as I knew it. It was the day after my high school prom². I was with [redacted] and we were on our way to [redacted]'s house when a white van pulled up out of nowhere and screeched to a halt right in front of [redacted]'s house. The police jumped out of the white van and yelled, "Are you Ross Goldstein?" I did not understand what was happening, especially because I recognized them as the same two police officers who had spoken with us a few weeks before at [redacted]'s house.

Then the police announced, "You are being charged with molesting the students at the Friedman computer classes!" Then they grabbed me and pushed me up against the side of the van and handcuffed me; they put the handcuffs on too tight. Then they threw me into the back of the van.

Inside the van, there were five or six police officers. There were no seats in the back of the van - only a garden patio type chair which was not secured to the van in any way. The police shoved me into it. I remember sitting there handcuffed, surrounded by them and being scared out of my mind and feeling utterly helpless. They were all yelling at me and at the same time they seemed to be laughing at me and taunting me as they tried to scare and intimidate me. Because we were inside the back of a van, the police had to stand hunched over. This created a frightening sense of being kidnapped. I could feel their open hostility and aggression towards me. They were relentless. They said things like:

"What are you going to do Mr. Big Shot?"

"How does it feel to be the worst person in the entire town of Great Neck?"

"How does it feel to know you're gonna hang for what you did?"

"You are going to go to jail and you're going to get raped yourself repeatedly..."

"You're going to die of AIDS in Attica!"

"How does it feel to know that you have been caught and that you are going to pay forever for the damage you have done?"

I went into total shock and I felt a deep and overwhelming sense of panic. Here I was alone, only 17 years old at the time, handcuffed in the back of an unmarked van, being threatened and having horrible accusations thrown at me. I began to cry uncontrollably and I broke down. I suffered an anxiety attack. Despite my fear, I tried my best to defend myself and explain to the police they had it all wrong. I remember that I

² Someone later told me that the limo driver that drove me and my date on the night of my prom was really an undercover police officer.

kept trying to say "NO WAY! You have got the wrong guy! I did not hurt anyone at Jesse's house!"

I tried to refer them back to the conversation we had a few weeks earlier at [REDACTED] house. I tried to remind them what I had told them and that I had been open and truthful to their questions. I remember that I had tears streaming down my face, "Why are you doing this to me?" The response I got was "because we KNOW you are guilty - 100% without any doubt - so you better SHUT THE FUCK UP and ADMIT IT in order to HELP YOURSELF KID!" No matter what I said to them, the police would just repeat, "We know you are guilty already!" To this day, I don't know what the police were referring to as the source of their confidence in my guilt. I don't know how long I was in the van, but the police were relentless and their tactics continued for what seemed like an eternity.

The police then took me to the police station and they interrogated me for many hours. At the police station, I learned that they had also picked up [REDACTED] and had threatened to charge him with being an accomplice of Arnold and Jesse Friedman too. I remember at one point, we were both in different rooms at the SCU station house both being interrogated and essentially pressured to admit that we did things in connection with the Friedmans.

I was never read my Miranda rights.

Different cops kept coming into the interrogation room. Some would talk sweetly and calmly to me while others would try to scare me and create a sense of fear and danger. It was classic "good cop bad cop". The police said that they wanted me to agree and admit that things had happened at the Friedman house. For example, they said things like:

"Ross, you know you are guilty..."

"It's ok to admit you're gay and that you like to suck dicks."

"We already know from too many of these kids that you made them suck yours."

"Until you admit and help us we are NOT going to drop it!"

Then another officer would come in and say, "I understand Ross - you're not the one who is to blame - why not help us and the kids and we'll give you complete IMMUNITY."

At some point my mom came to the police station. I later learned that [REDACTED] had let her know that I had been taken by the police. She came into the station in hysterics and demanding to know what was going on. The police told her "Your son is a MONSTER." She had a breakdown right then and there and so she did not have the immediate clarity to call a lawyer right away. I remained at the station a few more hours into the

late evening as the police continued to question me. Later that evening, the police decided not to officially charge me and they finally let me go home. One of the final things they said to me was "we'll be back - *expect us*" and that "we need your help in this ... *do the right thing for the community.*"

I did not hear from the police again until the day of my arrest, which was literally a few hours before high school graduation. The ill timing was clearly intentional, given the fact that my parents had hired a lawyer after the last incident with the police. My attorney telephoned SCU to let them know that if they wanted to speak to me or arrest me, they should call him to let him know and that he would arrange for me surrender; the police agreed. I am told that this is common practice.

So, clearly when the 8 to 12 police -- some with guns drawn -- came to my home that morning mere hours before my high school graduation and surrounded my house, it was a conscious decision to completely disregard their agreement with my attorney. Only my Grandmother and I were home at the time. They rang the doorbell. I opened the door and they showed me what they said was an arrest warrant and the officer ordered, "You must come with us!"

The police then told my Grandmother "Your grandson is a monster and needs to be locked up!"

I was handcuffed and driven to the police station in a generic police car. Before we reached the end of the block that I lived on, we happened to drive pass by my mother who walking home from work to attend my high school graduation. She saw me in the police car and she immediately rushed over to the police car.

"What are you doing?" she said. She visibly upset and on the verge of hysteria. "It's his graduation day! The ceremony is in 30 minutes! Why are you doing this to him?" One of police officers rolled down the window of the police car and threw the arrest warrant at my mother's face and said, "Here you go lady!" Then they drove off laughing as the light turned green.

When I got to the police station, I learned that there were hundreds of criminal charges against me. The criminal charges were all listed on paper. This was the first time I ever heard of things like "leap frog" and "naked limbo". I remember feeling sick and like losing my mind because the things they accused me of were so vile and disgusting.

When my lawyer showed up and looked at the paper containing the list of criminal charges, I could see that his mind was reeling. He said, "If you did this stuff kid, you are the worst sex offender maybe of all time." I maintained that this was I innocent and that this was "completely insane - and that I only knew Jesse for a little while and had no knowledge of what went on during the commuter classes". But my lawyer basically told me that it didn't matter because I was now in "DEEP SHIT!"

The police put me in a few line ups. I was not identified in the first line up. However I was subsequently identified in a second one. That was when the police formally brought me in to be booked and held overnight. Apparently, the police had arranged with Newsday ahead of time that I was going to be brought in that day (this courtesy they did not extend to my attorney) for its photo-op of the latest "monster" in the Friedman case. In fact, they were able to help the Newsday photographer get a scary looking picture of me after police officer called out to me and I turned to look at him. The picture appeared in the next day's edition of Newsday. (In a video clip in Andrew Jarecki's film you can see the that police woman who is bringing me into the station is wearing lots of make up and jewelry - making the whole thing seem somehow glamorous and incongruous.)

At this juncture, I was totally unwilling to cooperate with the police and the District Attorney's office.

The day after I was arrested, I lost my life. I lost all my friends and hardly anyone would talk to me. This was in large part due to the hysteria that had surrounded this case and other child abuse cases that had attracted worldwide media attention.

In addition being ostracized in my personal life, in the legal system I was being made to stand trial as Jesse's codefendant. Not knowing what he had done or not done made it impossible to feel confident about going to trial with him.

I felt very scared that a jury would believe the testimony of the young kids over us. And when Judge Boklan promised to televise the trial, this added even more pressure to on me to eventually cooperate and say the things that the prosecutor and police wanted me to say to make their case against Jesse Friedman. At a certain point during this process, I became locked into cooperating with the prosecution - and from that point on I said whatever I had to in order to avoid the possibility of a long jail sentence.

In the weeks leading up to my grand jury appearance, I was coached, rehearsed and directed by the prosecutor and Detective William Hatch for hours on end. I was told that it was my role to confirm what the complainants had said when they testified about what happened to them during the computer classes. According to them, this was how the police and the prosecutor built up evidence that would "stick" at a trial. I was going to have to take the stand and testify against Jesse at a trial because the prosecutor and police believed that there was a good chance that none of the younger kids would be willing to take the stand at a trial.

During these weeks of preparation, I could not and would not confirm any allegation or admit to doing something or seeing Jesse doing something to any complainant because I truly had no knowledge or participation or witnessed anything of the sort. The prosecutor would then threaten me by placing the Y/O status deal off the table. This happened repeatedly. This was like being tortured and treated like a puppet.

Just imagine the trauma of having actual memories stamped out and erased from history and replaced with new violent images of incidents that never took place. It was truly like being trapped in a nightmare that I could not wake up from.

Other times the prosecutor would threaten to revoke the Y/O deal - he would announce that [redacted] would soon be arrested as the next defendant in the case - and then [redacted] would be offered the Y/O status instead of me (at which point he claimed that he would get [redacted] to testify against me and Jesse at trial). This happened 2 or 3 times after I refused to testify about something that I never saw or did.

Amazingly, later on the prosecutor and police at one point even offered to the drop charges against me if I was able to help them find a picture or video which had been made at the Friedman house by Arnold or Jesse. I am told that no evidence of this kind was ever found.

The police and prosecutor's idea that two of my high school friends and I would go over together to Jesse's house and use the computer class context to commit crimes against the kids is 100% UNTRUE. I never recruited anyone to take part in anything going on at Jesse's house - and Jesse never recruited me to help him with the computer classes. The two friends who the police said were involved had no actual involvement whatsoever in the classes. I believe that the police were hoping to arrest them both and convict them too. As a result, the prosecutor put as much pressure as he could on me to testify against them as part of my cooperation in trying to secure the Y/O deal. This was a heartbreaking experience because these other guys were my close friends who I had been playing music with on and off in bands since the 7th grade. This case unfortunately ended our friendships.

In actuality, as I explained earlier, I was friendly with Jesse for only a small window of time between November 1986 (when I first transferred to the Village School) and February 1987. We would work on music recordings together in the recording studio that was set up at the school. Sometimes we would meet up after school and listen to cassette mixes of what we had worked on together. It was during a few of these times spent listening to music in his room that I happened to hear or see kids arriving at his house for the computer class. When this happened Arnold would come down and knock on Jesse's door and expect him to stop what we were doing and help him teach the computer. When this happened, I would leave his house and go home (I lived just up the street from him at 51 Piccadilly Road) It's possible that during one or two of these times - as I was leaving - Jesse introduced me to some of the kids in the computer classes. I want to note that in order to exit the house from Jesse's bedroom, I had to go through the computer class area.

When I was first interrogated by the police the dates of the alleged crimes were said to have occurred in the Spring of 1986 - which was clearly impossible because this time period was before I knew or had ever met Jesse. When the police learned this they somehow were able to move the dates on the charges to the Fall and Winter of 1986

through 1987 - placing them in the window of time when Jesse and I were friends.

At my sentencing the Judge surprised me by revoking the Y/O deal and sentencing me to 2 to 6 years. She also read parts of my grand jury testimony into the record. I later had to appeal my sentence in order to get the Y/O that was promised to me.

Again I would like to make it very clear: every single thing found in my grand jury testimony that the Judge read into the record at the date of my sentencing was untrue and was said by me at the time to avoid a trial, to secure my Y/O status and avoid to a long jail sentence. This is a tragic irony. For example, in my grand jury testimony I stated that I was involved in the computer classes until June of 1987. This is untrue. Jesse and I stopped being friendly around February of 1987 after I met a few other Village School students who were musicians and I joined a band with them. As such, I know that I never went over to his house again after February 1987. This is a good example of a seemingly small detail in my testimony that the used prosecutor to make the other evidence "stick" in their case.

In addition to the tremendous amount of preparation by the prosecution, parts of my testimony incorporated specific actual instances that I had observed at Jesse's house. For example, once I saw some of the kids playing highly pixelated pornographic computer games and Arnold was not in the room at the time. I was there for only a minute or two. As a result of telling this to the prosecutor, he was able to include or add other more serious incidents against Jesse. The prosecutor essentially had me adding scenarios onto the actual memories that I had from the handful of times I was at Jesse's house to listen to music. In this way, they could take a real event and embellish it or meld it in order to fit into their theory of violence and draconian abuse at the Friedman house. The police actually believed that this abuse was happening in a ritualistic manner - week after week, year after year and that Jesse and I were conducting an open homosexual relationship in front of the class and that we also had our "favorites" among the students to abuse at our pleasure. This is simply untrue.

Please understand that I am writing because I believe that this information should be included as part of the official record in relation to the Panel's review of this case and its subsequent recommendation.

My decision to keep this part of my life story private and not to share it publicly (or in the film *Capturing the Friedmans*) comes from my wish to move on in life and to preserve my privacy. It's hard sometimes to live with the damage it has caused others, not to mention me and my name. I prefer to focus on ways of exploring the healing process and working on creating love and compassion in my life.

The impetus and motivation for coming forward to speak about it now was a direct result of the announcement of a transparent and honest review of the case by an independent panel. This meant not only a review of the defendants but a review of the

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entire case - which MUST take into account all that was improperly and perhaps illegally done by the police, the prosecution and Judge Boklan in both their independent and collective handling of the investigation and prosecution.

Thank you for taking the time to read this over. I hope you will consider my earnestness and the importance of these details when you are forming your recommendation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'R' followed by a horizontal line that tapers to the right.

Ross Goldstein