

arts



Author Mike Lew

Real Voices, Real Recovery, Real Hope for Men Surviving Sexual Abuse in 'Leaping'

BY CHRISTOPHER KAUFMAN

Almost two months ago, the editor of *Out in the Mountains* asked if I would be interested in reviewing *Leaping Upon the Mountains*, Mike Lew's follow-up to his seminal work *Victims No Longer*, for many years the only accessible book available to male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. I blithely threw out a "Sure, I'd be happy to review it" answer, knowing that the book was already on my shelf at home, ready for me to crack the spine. It had been sitting there since I bought my copy from Mike at a survivors' weekend over a year before.

And there it had sat for over a year, on my bookshelf, next to my bed, looking forlorn, gathering deeply symbolic dust and waiting for me to brave the deep emotional waters it promised. And then my editor started calling, wanting to know whether she needed to replace my review on the publication schedule with something else, and I said, "I'm doing it, no problem — any day now, I'll turn it in." So I found myself, on the night before the deadline, going for a marathon reading session and writing the review the day of the deadline. I'm glad I have an editor that knows how to crack a whip, even as I sit here on the edge of tears, filled with the sadness of these men's stories and overjoyed with their victory over their abusers.

review

"Leaping Upon the Mountains: Men Proclaiming Victory Over Sexual Child Abuse"

By Mike Lew

Small Wonder Books, Jamaica Plain MA / North Atlantic Books, Berkeley CA

Now, I tell this story not to demonstrate that I'm a champion procrastinator, but rather to note that reading a Mike Lew book is not a task to be lightly undertaken. It's hard reading. It requires a strong commitment to conscious emotional work. When I found *Victims No Longer* in a remainder pile, I bought it blindly without really understanding the journey I was about to begin. I had never told anyone the full story of my own childhood abuse. I had no idea how deeply the hurt and pain caused by my abuse had affected my life, my ability to form healthy relationships, and my relationship to abusers of power. I credit *Victims No Longer*, along with an amazingly supportive partner and a champion therapist, with turning my life around and bringing me to a new, and healthy, understanding of my body, my sexuality and my community.

It took me almost two years to read *Victims No Longer*, but I plowed through *Leaping Upon the Mountains* in two nights. It's a shorter work and it's fully dedicated to survivors' own stories of recovery. Unlike *Victims No Longer*, it's not a clin-

ical self-help guide to the process of recovery but rather a series of writings by male survivors on their own experience of recovery. Mike has created a vehicle for men to talk about what they did in their healing work; he allows the men's voices to drive the work, and he does not analyze their words or try to fit them into a dry clinical modality. In so doing, Mike has supported our ability to understand boy victims of sexual abuse as real people, with a deeply human instinct for survival. We get to see the men who have contributed to this book as our friends, neighbors, co-workers, spouses and lovers. We come to understand that They are Us. We are Them.

With the Catholic Church sexual abuse scandal overwhelming the airwaves, it's easy to forget that survivors of childhood sexual abuse are normal people who live in our communities, our neighborhoods and our homes. Boy victims of sexual abuse have never before received as much attention as they have in the last several months. It's easy to start seeing the sexual abuse scandal, as depicted in the media, as a caricature or a parody.

With each news story of another fallen priest and another bishop in denial, the scandal starts to feel like an overwrought movie-of-the-week. We start to cheer each new revelation as growing evidence that an oppressive institution is crumbling.

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