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On the Rabbi's Knee

Do the Orthodox Jews have a Catholic-priest problem?

By [Robert Kolker](#)

"Does it hurt?"

The boy and his teacher were in the front seat of the teacher's blue Plymouth sedan. The boy was 12 years old, pale and shy, and new to Brooklyn—plucked out of another life in Toronto after his mother remarried. He'd lost his father when he was 7, and the promise of a fresh start had appealed to him—a new family, a new world to explore. But a few months had passed, and the boy was lonely. His new stepsisters ignored him; he had trouble making friends at his new school. So when a popular teacher who lived nearby took an interest in him, it seemed like welcome news.

The teacher was in his early twenties—closer in age to many of his students than to his colleagues—tall and athletic, with a shock of red hair, and the kids liked him: He wasn't the type who'd shake his fist at the heavens if he'd heard someone had gone to see a movie. The teacher taught first grade, and the boy was too old to be in his class, but they were neighbors. On the way to the bus stop, the boy would spot the teacher walking from his modest ground-floor newlywed apartment, coffee mug in hand, to his car. And on many days, the teacher was happy to offer the boy and a few other neighborhood kids a lift.

The teacher would usually park on the access road alongside Ocean Parkway, and they'd all walk into school together. But on this cold autumn morning, a few months into the school year, the boy would later remember, the teacher didn't leave the car right away. As the boy and his friends began emptying out of the backseat, the boy remembers the teacher turning to him.

"Stay a few minutes. I want to talk to you."

The other kids left.

"Come to the front," the boy remembers the teacher saying. "Come sit beside me."

Was he in trouble? Had he done something wrong? He couldn't think of anything, but he did as he was told.

The Plymouth had a wide bench seat up front, with no split down the middle.

"Come sit on my lap," said the teacher.

Then the teacher picked him up, the boy remembers, and put him on his lap. The teacher's penis was erect.

The boy's mind flooded. *Should I scream? Run?* He looked toward Ocean Parkway—*Isn't somebody watching?*

The teacher unfastened the boy's belt, reached around, and slipped his hand into the boy's pants, the boy says.

He couldn't see the teacher's face. But he could hear him.

"Does it hurt?" the boy recalls the teacher saying, over and over. His voice was urgent but also oddly indifferent, as if he were asking about the weather. "Does it hurt?"

The boy was panicked now, desperate to open the car door and run into the school for help. But he was 12 years old, and the teacher was older and stronger, and, after all, he was a teacher.

All the boy wanted was to fit into his new world. The sooner this ended, he thought, the sooner he could forget it ever happened.

The ordeal lasted just minutes, the boy remembers. Then the teacher told him to go. "I don't remember the exact words, but he said something like 'Don't tell anyone,' " the boy says.

So into the school the boy went, wondering if he was the only Orthodox Jewish boy who had ever been molested by a rabbi.

For decades, David Framowitz, 48 years old now and living in Israel, tried to forget about Rabbi Yehuda Kolko. But he couldn't put the memories behind him. A few years ago, prompted by a visit to his old neighborhood, Framowitz found himself impulsively Googling the rabbi's name. He had to know what had become of him. What he found was at once comforting and devastating: a link to a blog with the rabbi's name and the words *known pedophile*. For the first time in 35 years, Framowitz had reason to believe that Kolko was not just his private tormentor.

On May 4, Framowitz filed a \$20 million federal lawsuit against Kolko and Yeshiva Torah Temimah of Flatbush, Brooklyn, for what Framowitz says happened on at least fifteen occasions over two years, from 1969 to 1971—in the front seat of the Plymouth, and at the yeshiva at the end of recess, and at Camp Agudah in the Catskills, where Kolko worked for several summers. Framowitz was listed as a John Doe plaintiff in the legal filing, but he now has decided that putting a name and a face on the case will strengthen its credibility.

Framowitz is far from the rabbi's only accuser. A second plaintiff, who wishes to maintain his anonymity, claims to have been fondled and rubbed up against by Kolko in the eighties, most often in the basement book room of the yeshiva. And on Friday, Framowitz's attorney, Jeffrey Herman, was expected to file a separate, \$10 million suit on behalf of an unnamed plaintiff who says he was abused by Kolko in the late eighties. All told, Herman says he knows of as many as twenty victims between the ages of 19 and 50 who say they were abused by Kolko. There's the seventh-grader whom Kolko allegedly pulled into a closet in the seventies and held against his erection until that boy broke free. The dozen campers who came forward in the eighties, only to be rebuffed. And one boy who, twenty years later, is said to have punched Kolko at a Bris they were both attending, because of what he said Kolko had done to him years earlier. "It particularly haunted them," Herman says, "that Kolko was still at the school and children were still being exposed to him."

One rabbi molesting twenty students over several decades would be disturbing enough, but Framowitz's lawsuit alleges that there was also a conspiracy among powerful members of the ultra-Orthodox community to cover up Kolko's actions. The suit names not just Kolko but his yeshiva—accusing Kolko's boss, Rabbi Lipa Margulies, of orchestrating "a campaign of intimidation, concealment and misrepresentations designed to prevent victims from filing lawsuits." According to the complaint, Margulies, a pillar of the Borough Park community, took extraordinary measures to derail a rabbinical court action, or *beit din*, against Kolko in the eighties—telling family members of a dozen alleged victims that if they came forward, they'd be shunned by the ultra-Orthodox world and their other children would be expelled from his respected yeshiva and kept from enrolling elsewhere (Margulies is named in the suit but not as a defendant). The suit also alleges that Margulies had a revered ultra-Orthodox rabbi, Pinchus Scheinberg (also not a defendant), tell the victims that as a matter of Jewish law, Kolko would have had to have more than just fondled them for the acts to qualify as sexual abuse.

The yeshiva—then called Torah Vodaath, now called Torah Temimah—is known today as the Harvard of the Jewish world, educating 1,000 boys at a time in a complex of modern buildings on Ocean Parkway.

Kolko is no longer just a first-grade Hebrew teacher but also a school administrator and active in the school's summer camp, Camp Silver Lake. In the past six months, as Framowitz's attorney and other community members attempted to bring Kolko to a *beit din*, Margulies permitted Kolko to keep teaching. He even stayed on for two days after the lawsuit was announced—until last week, when, as *New York* was preparing this story, the yeshiva placed him on administrative leave and issued a statement denying “that anyone acting on its behalf took any steps to prevent alleged victims of sexual abuse from seeking redress in rabbinical or civil courts.” (Kolko and Margulies would not respond to requests for comment. Scheinberg, 93 and living in Israel, could not be reached.)

What is perhaps most troubling about Framowitz's case is the idea that Kolko, if culpable, could just be the tip of the iceberg. Rabbi-on-child molestation is a widespread problem in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, and one that has long been covered up, according to rabbis, former students, parents, social-service workers, sociologists, psychologists, victims' rights advocates, and survivors of abuse interviewed for this story. They argue that sexual repression, the resistance to modernity, and the barriers to outsiders foster an atmosphere conducive to abuse and silence. The most outspoken advocates believe that the secular authorities—the police and the Brooklyn district attorney's office—are intimidated by rabbinic authorities who don't want their community's issues aired publicly and who wield considerable political influence. They are hoping Framowitz's lawsuit—one of just a few of its kind ever filed and the first to allege a high-level cover-up—could be a signal event, encouraging scores of molestation victims to come forward. Already, the Kolko case is said to have influenced plans for an unrelated case against a prominent Jewish summer camp.

The echoes of another insular religious community—one with its own particular set of sexual restrictions and a proven capacity for institutional denial—are, of course, impossible to miss. “This reminds me of where the Catholic Church was fifteen or twenty years ago,” says Herman, who just before taking on the Kolko case won a \$5 million judgment for abuse victims of a Catholic priest. “What I see are some members of the community turning a blind eye to what's going on in their backyards.”

Even before David Framowitz first found himself alone with Rabbi Kolko, the outlines of his young life had seemed like something out of Dickens. His father, Alfred Szmuk, a public-school teacher, had died when David was 7, leaving his mother, Naomi, not yet 30, to care for him and his younger brother, Jeffrey. For a few years, the family stayed in Toronto; Naomi supported them by teaching Hebrew school. Then Naomi was introduced to Saul Framowitz, a highly Orthodox Borough Park man who had recently lost his wife and only son in a traffic accident and was left with three teenage daughters to raise alone. Within months, there was a courtship and a small wedding, and the widow and her two boys moved in with the widower and his three girls, sharing a three-bedroom, third-floor walk-up in Borough Park.

It was the autumn of 1969, and as the rest of the world seemed to be hurtling headlong into the future, 12-year-old David felt as if he'd been flung back in time. He was taken aback by the bobbing sea of black hats, the women with wigs and long, dark dresses, the way the whole place screeched to a halt on Friday night. It was here that thousands of Hasidic refugees from Europe had chosen to repopulate the people, steadfastly preserving the shtetl life that had almost been destroyed. Any sense of the modern world was ferociously held at bay—no movies or TV or pop music, even newspapers were suspect. The community's views on sex were perhaps most jarring. Boys were trained never to lock eyes with a woman who wasn't related; some were taught not to touch their genitals when they washed.

David and his brother were sent to school at a strict Hasidic yeshiva where everyone spoke Yiddish. David stayed through the end of the year, but hated it. “I told my parents that I was not going back there.” He'd tried fitting into the ultra-Orthodox mold but hadn't made many friends. The next year, he was enrolled at a new school—Torah Vodaath. The founder, Rabbi Lipa Margulies, had made a name for the school by cherry-picking top talent, paying his teachers more, and working them harder. “He's single-minded,” says Rabbi Nosson Scherman, a former teacher there. “He's obsessed with his school.”

Torah Vodaath seemed for a time to be a good fit for David. “It was more what I grew up with in Toronto,” he says, “a more normal school, where they had Hebrew lessons or Torah, but they also had English, math, and social studies.” A few of David's classmates lived on his street. Soon after the start of the school year, Framowitz says, “I met some kids from the school, and they said, ‘We have a lift,’ and I said, ‘With whom?’ and they said, ‘One of the teachers lives here, and he's gonna give us a ride.’” After the first attack in the Plymouth, Framowitz says, he tried to avoid Kolko. He tried not walking down his block. “But

how many blocks can you skip to go around to get to school,” he asks, “before other kids started to wonder?” Some days, he’d be late and miss the bus, or it would be freezing, and he couldn’t come up with a reason not to get into Kolko’s car when the rest of his friends were piling aboard. Sometimes, it would be a Sunday, when the school day ended early, and he was playing with his friends.

“Here, I’m going home,” Framowitz says Kolko would say. “I’ll give you a ride.”

“No, no, no, I’m here. I’m gonna catch the bus with my friends.”

“No, come, we’ll go for a ride home.”

“You’re a young boy, and you get scared,” Framowitz says. “What happens if you *don’t* go with him? He’s a rabbinic authority in the school. He’s the teacher. Will something happen that will cause you to get into trouble because of him—because you didn’t show up to go with him on the ride?”

The abuse, Framowitz says, became ritualistic: Kolko would coax him into his car, place him on his lap, and fondle him. Kolko would keep his own pants up, ensuring that his genitals would never touch the boy—a line, perhaps, the rabbi was afraid to cross. Facing forward, David had no view of Kolko during the act. “Did he ejaculate? I have no idea. Was he getting there? I have no idea. I was 12 years old.” Even avoiding Kolko’s car wasn’t a solution: Framowitz says Kolko would corner him after recess at school and rub against him.

Framowitz thought the end of the school year would bring an end to the abuse. But that summer, his parents sent him to Camp Agudah—run by Agudath Israel of America, a powerful ultra-Orthodox organization—and Kolko was a counselor. When Framowitz saw him, his heart sank. After one baseball game, “he pulled me into the woods, just past the center field, and pushed me up against a tree and started rubbing against me,” Framowitz says. Other times, he says, the incidents were more fleeting—Kolko would wait until he and Framowitz were alone and rub his knee against Framowitz’s groin.

Early on, Framowitz says, he tried telling his mother about Kolko, but she didn’t know how to respond. The new marriage wasn’t going well; his mother had miscarried—a potential replacement son for his stepfather, to help make up for what the accident had taken away. “It was just terrible pressure,” Framowitz says. “One time, she picked herself up, with me and my brother, and she took us down to Manhattan and we stayed in a hotel for a couple of nights. With all the problems in the house, I couldn’t force myself to make this into a big issue. And my stepfather just couldn’t understand it. He couldn’t see how a rabbi, a *respectable rabbi*, would be doing such things, so I must be making up these stories to get attention.”

After a while, Framowitz just stopped talking about it. “I wasn’t getting anywhere. They weren’t defending me. So I said, *Okay, I have to suffer*. For family harmony. I’d tell myself, *I just want to be a normal kid, but I can’t. I can’t do anything, because I’ll get into trouble. I can’t get into trouble because I can’t cause more upheavals in the house. So just be quiet, and it’ll go away.*”

Yehuda Kolko first caught the attention of religious authorities as early as the mid-eighties, after a major sexual-abuse scandal rocked the ultra-Orthodox world in Brooklyn. A Hasidic psychologist named Avrohom Mondrowitz had been accused of not just molesting but having intercourse with four boys in his care, ages 10 to 16, some of whom he allegedly took away on long weekends. He was indicted in 1985 but decamped for Israel. In the wake of the case, several prominent rabbis in Brooklyn decided to field complaints about rabbis and others accused of molesting kids. The rabbi chosen to look into Borough Park, who spoke to *New York* on the condition of anonymity, says Kolko’s name came up repeatedly.

This rabbi wasted little time empaneling six rabbis to informally hear Kolko’s accusers. Kolko’s alleged problems, according to this rabbi, stemmed from his summers at a camp not far from Camp Agudah that Kolko apparently had an ownership stake in during the eighties. According to a former counselor at the camp, who also wishes to remain anonymous, it was an open secret among counselors that Kolko was misbehaving with several campers. A dozen kids had individually come to different counselors, the former counselor says, to complain that Kolko woke them at night, offered them rides in a golf cart, and then let them steer if they sat in his lap. Others said he’d visit them at night and touch them in inappropriate places. But these counselors were 18 or 19 years old, unsure of how to handle the claims, the former counselor says. Only after the Mondrowitz case broke a few years later did some of the former campers and counselors come forward. The panel of six rabbis heard the campers’ stories and sympathized, according to the rabbi who convened the panel. But, he says, “there was no mechanism in the community to stop Kolko

from teaching, except to go to the cops.”

As the six-rabbi panel knew, rabbinical-court proceedings have no real power to substantiate abuse claims or punish abusers. Going to the police is largely frowned on in the ultra-Orthodox world; the notion of *mesira*, dating to the days of the shtetl, equates going to outsiders with treason. So instead, the teenagers and their families decided first to try to persuade Margulies, Kolko’s boss at Torah Temimah, to force Kolko to sell his stake in the camp and resign from the school. At a preliminary meeting with some of Kolko’s accusers, Margulies asked whom they had as witnesses. “Each name he dismissed: ‘This one is in a fantasyland, this one is a thief, you can’t trust any of them,’ ” the source recalls Margulies saying. “And he was not going to do anything about it.”

The group, along with parents and former campers from Camp Agudah, then tried summoning a *beit din* to rule on Kolko. They demanded Kolko not be there so the victims would feel comfortable telling their stories. But when the proceeding began, he was there, so they left. Then Margulies is said to have started a second *beit din*. According to Framowitz’s lawsuit, Pinchus Scheinberg, the powerful rabbi who was close to Margulies, contacted several of Kolko’s alleged victims, listened to their complaints, and told them that what happened to them was not abuse—that there needed to be penetration and that because there was none, their claims were not actionable. Then, the lawsuit says, threats followed. One father allegedly was told by Margulies over the phone that if his boy continued to complain, the safety of the rest of his children could not be assured. Both *beit dins* were halted, the victims never went to the police, and for years, Margulies told others who inquired about Kolko that the rabbi and the school had been exonerated.

Is molestation more common in the Orthodox Jewish community than it is elsewhere? There are no reliable statistics on the subject—molestation often goes unreported, even in relatively liberal communities—but there’s reason to believe the answer to that question might be yes. “I wasn’t even looking for it, and the amazing thing was how often it would just come up,” says Hella Winston, whose recent book, *Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels*, examines ultra-Orthodox Brooklyn through the eyes of some dissident members who struggle with the dictates of the community. “I heard more from men than from women. What was really shocking was how many boys—so many boys—have had this experience. People I’ve interviewed have told me every Hasidic kid has heard about this happening to someone.”

There are some who believe the repression in the ultra-Orthodox community can foster abuse. Sex before marriage in Hasidic life is strictly forbidden (unmarried men and women are barely allowed to look at one another), and even within marriage, sex is tightly regulated (couples aren’t allowed to have sex, for instance, during menstruation and the week after). As Winston notes, fathers can’t attend their daughters’ school plays, “as the sound of women singing can lead to uncontrollable male sexual arousal.” In a world of Paris Hilton videos and Victoria’s Secret billboards, there are few outlets for an Orthodox man with compulsions the community refuses to acknowledge even exist. The repression, some say, creates a fertile environment for deviance.

Taboos against reporting sexual abuse don’t just promote silence—they may also encourage molesters. Besides the general prohibition against talking about sex, there is also the *shondah* factor—the overwhelming concern with shame (a child who makes an abuse claim can be thought to bring shame on his whole family). Then there’s the prohibition against *lashon hara*, or “evil speech”; the thinking is that virtually any public complaint about another person amounts to slander. There is *shalom bayit*, or the mandate to maintain peaceful domestic relations; many women and children have been made to feel that it’s their responsibility to maintain harmony by not turning in their abusers. There’s the notion of *Chillul Hashem*—desecrating God’s name. This can be invoked if you say anything bad about the community at all. Finally, there is *mesira*, or the suspicion of secular authorities.

The *beit dins* are hardly an effective mechanism for dealing with abuse. Given the choice between going after sexual abusers and protecting the community from scrutiny by outsiders, victims’ advocates say, religious authorities protect the community almost every time. “They don’t have investigative bodies,” says Rabbi Yosef Blau, a Yeshiva University adviser who has spoken out about other abuse cases. “They don’t do DNA evidence.” There’s one ancient Jewish legal theory that the testimony of a mentally ill man is more highly regarded than the testimony of a woman. And if *beit dins* fail a victim, there is no appeal. “We’re not accountable to anyone,” says Mark Dratch, a modern-Orthodox rabbi who chaired a task force on rabbinical improprieties for the Rabbinical Council of America. “Even the Catholic Church supposedly has more of a structure for accountability than us. If we don’t have the training to deal with a victim who

comes to us for help, we have the potential to make them a victim again.”

The Brooklyn district attorney’s office insists it aggressively pursues sex-abuse cases in the Orthodox community, and D.A. Charles Hynes has been commended for launching Project Eden, a Hasidic-sanctioned program that reaches out to ultra-Orthodox victims of domestic violence. “There is nothing different about the way we handle cases in any community, whether they be sex abuse, homicide, or any other crime,” says Hynes spokesman Jerry Schmetterer. It bears noting, however, that for months, Hynes’s office resisted *New York’s* requests for information on Project Eden, and still won’t speak in detail about how they handle sex-abuse cases in the Orthodox community. Victims’ advocates have long argued that Hynes’s office simply doesn’t actively go after abusers in the community, and that when complaints do come their way, they’re often too quick to defer to the ruling of a *beit din*. “I’ve never seen any district attorney do this with the Catholics,” says Amy Neustein, perhaps this issue’s best-known cause célèbre, who in 1986 claimed that her 6-year-old daughter was being sexually abused by her husband, only to have the child taken out of her custody forever. “The *beit dins* are hijacking the whole justice system.”

Newsday recently uncovered a document, purported to be from the State Department, suggesting that Hynes has all but dropped the Mondrowitz case—ceasing to prod the State Department in its extradition battle. Hynes denies this. “Our position has always been that were Mondrowitz to return to the United States, we would prosecute him for his heinous crimes,” says Rhonnie Jaus, chief of Hynes’s sex-crimes bureau. Now that there’s a civil case against Kolko, are they pursuing a criminal investigation? “We look into cases all the time that are beyond the statute of limitations to see if there are any cases that fall within the statute,” Jaus says. “That’s what happened with the priest investigations.” No Kolko investigation has yet been launched.

What’s certain is that much of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish leadership still refuses to acknowledge that sexual abuse is even a problem. Efforts to persuade Orthodox organizations like Agudath Israel and Torah Umesorah (the National Society for Hebrew Day Schools) to develop a sex-offender registry have so far been all but ignored. Even Henna White, the Lubavitcher community liaison to Hynes’s Project Eden, has complained that she can’t get into the yeshivas to be heard on the subject of abuse. “In New York, we’re going into the girls’ schools,” White said at a conference in January. “Unfortunately, we’re not going into the boys’ schools, and not for lack of trying. Our right-wing yeshivas do not want us there, and there are many people who have tried. The feeling is that this is not a conversation they want to open up.”

“The bottom line is that abuse is a universal issue that closed communities hide because it threatens them,” says one former Lubavitcher in his thirties who says he was molested by an ultra-Orthodox neighbor, and who wishes to remain anonymous. “Whether it’s Jewish or Amish or Mennonite or Catholic or Muslim, it doesn’t make a difference. I feel like this is kind of like a fungus. It grows in the dark.”

When Framowitz was 14, he began hanging out at the Jewish Defense League in Borough Park. “I needed to get away,” he says. “It was more of a showing-off, ‘Oh, I’m JDL,’ like putting up a façade. I was looking for somebody to defend me because I wasn’t getting protection at school or at home.”

Recognizing how unhappy David was, his parents sent him to yet another yeshiva, in Cleveland, for ninth grade. He lasted a year there, six months at a yeshiva in Toronto, and half a year each in Long Beach and Far Rockaway. In Baltimore, he says, he was molested again, by a rabbi who is now deceased. In retrospect, Framowitz wonders if something about him made him seem vulnerable to pedophiles. “I grew up not wanting to make more trouble than there was already in the house,” he says. “Maybe I took everything as it came.”

He was 16 when he dropped out of the yeshiva system, moved home to Borough Park, and started working at a computer-services company on Park Avenue while he pursued his GED. He met his future wife, Joyce, in a youth group; he told her about Kolko almost immediately, he says, and she understood. By 1983, he’d become a CPA, and he and his wife had had their first child and decided to make aliyah before their son was old enough to start school in Brooklyn. The whole family, including his parents, eventually moved to Israel.

Three years ago, on a visit to New York, Framowitz was walking down Ocean Parkway when he ran into his seventh- and eighth-grade rebbe. He called out.

“Rabbi Kaufman, Rabbi Kaufman—I don’t know if you remember me, but you were my teacher 30 years

ago.”

The rabbi squinted. “I remember the face, but I don’t remember the name.”

“David Framowitz.”

“Oh,” said the rabbi. “David Framowitz. How are you? It’s been so long.”

“And I told myself, *David, say something, tell him that you were molested by Rabbi Kolko. And I said to myself, I can’t. It’s a different world, you’re not there. Forget it—you’ve made a life for yourself.*”

Back in Israel, he found himself typing Kolko’s name into Google.

Framowitz found what he was looking for on a blog called Un-Orthodox Jew. The site—one anonymous insider’s blistering, some say heretical, accusations of hypocrisy and corruption in the community—started about a year ago and took just months to report a half-million hits. Its anonymous Webmaster, who calls himself UOJ, has made the Kolko case his main cause. UOJ has never met with me, but he calls when I e-mail him. When he does, my caller I.D. is blocked. “Being from the family I’m from, I know *everybody*,” he tells me. “They’ve all been to my home. My family’s involved in all aspects of the Jewish community.”

UOJ says that he first became disenchanted with the established Jewish leadership when as a young man he attended a *beit din* with his father and saw the rabbis there behaving in less than honest ways. “They were businessmen, mostly,” he says. His earliest postings, in March of last year, reflect what would become his signature cynicism. “By the time I was Bar-Mitzvah, I got the whole picture,” he wrote. “The guys with the money got the respect, the final say in the schools and shuls, and were the guests of honor at Jewish functions, period! . . . Give me one truly religious and honorable Jew, and I will give you one hundred thousand who do not have a clue.” UOJ’s first reference to Kolko came on June 26 of last year, in a broadside against Margulies. In no uncertain terms, he accused Margulies of harboring a pedophile and threatening the parents of victims into silence.

The initial responses were hostile. “You’re a bit too bitter, even for my taste,” one reader commented. “Maybe you are just a typical extreme left-wing Jew who hates Rabbonim and the Torah.”

“You are entitled to your opinion,” UOJ replied. “ALL MY POSTS ARE FACTS, AS UGLY AS THEY ARE!!!!”

“FACTS,” his critic replied. “Like what, the *New York Times*?”

But, a day later, on June 27, came another anonymous comment claiming to confirm what UOJ had said. And then another, from someone saying he was molested by Kolko. And another, from someone claiming to be the parent of another victim, and mentioning a failed *beit din*.

This is the string of posts that Framowitz noticed on Google. On September 23, he told his story in detail as a comment, using only his first name.

“I too was molested by Rabbi Kolko,” he wrote, “both while a student in 7th and 8th grades and during those same summers whilst a camper in Camp Agudah. . . . He would insert his hands down the front of my pants and would begin to ‘search around,’ to say the least. At the same time he would pull me closer to himself, or would push himself forward against myself, sometimes even pushing me into the steering wheel, to the point that it hurt. Unfortunately I didn’t react or complain. I of course told my parents and tried on several times to explain to them what I was going through, but they didn’t want to believe me and my ‘stories,’ etc. So I just shut up and let the molestation and perversion continue. . . . I feel that it is about time that the wall of silence be torn down.”

A few months later, after getting dozens of similar comments and e-mails, UOJ listed Jeffrey Herman’s name and phone number. He says he hadn’t spoken with Herman—he’d just noticed him as a guest on *The O’Reilly Factor*, talking about a clergy sex-abuse case, and thought that anyone reading his site who wanted confidentiality might consider calling him. “The key for me,” UOJ says, “was that on his Website, Herman said that he had strategies for getting around the statute of limitations.”

UOJ posted Herman’s name and number. When Herman, in turn, sent an e-mail saying he’d be happy to speak with alleged victims confidentially, Framowitz saw the posting and called him. Herman, an observant Jew from Miami, has handled millions of dollars in sex-abuse claims against clergy and school systems,

mainly against the Catholic Church. He says he was interested in working on Jewish cases for the same reasons he works on Catholic ones. “People say, ‘Oh, are you gonna go after a rabbi?’ ” he says. “That’s kind of a funny question to me. I see the kind of work I’m doing as protecting kids. Jewish kids are certainly as worth protecting as Catholic kids.”

On February 2, UOJ paid for a bulk mailing to Orthodox homes in Borough Park, Flatbush, Williamsburg, and Crown Heights that might be too observant to have access to the Internet. The mailing accused Kolko of molestation and Margulies of a cover-up and even included their phone numbers. That’s when UOJ says he started receiving threats—“We’re gonna get your family” and “We know who you are.” (Many of these e-mails have been forwarded to Herman.) People accused him of betraying his community and having an ax to grind against Kolko and Margulies. *The Jewish Press* ran an editorial blasting the mailing. A rival blog called End UOJ was created. But the most shocking responses came from those who believed that accusing Kolko of abuse—true or not—was worse than the abuse itself. “Certainly speaking evil of somebody, truth or otherwise, establishes the most severe of all wrongdoings,” one pseudonymous comment on UOJ reads—“far, far worse than [*sic*] ‘child sexual abuse,’ and the punishment far more severe.” The post goes on to claim that having sex with a child is punishable by 39 lashings “at the most,” whereas *lashon hara* is punishable by leprosy—“a far worse penalty.”

Now that there’s a lawsuit, UOJ feels vindicated. “Molestation is rampant,” he says. “It’s not a one-in-a-million case. There’s at least one in every school. And I’m going to go after them one at a time.”

David Framowitz has four adult children of his own now, with careers and graduate degrees. His kids have served in the Israeli Army and lost friends to terror bombings. He lives in a sunny, concrete split-level house near the West Bank, and considers himself a modern-Orthodox Jew now, wrapping the leather straps of *tefillin* around his arms every morning, praying three times a day, spending Sabbath at shul. He does not wear the black hat or suit or the curls of payes. He has told his children all about Kolko.

For years, he says, he’s been happy—but he knows he’s been affected by the abuse. “I’d tell myself, *It wasn’t my fault, I’m not going to let this ruin my life,*” he says. “You keep yourself busy and go to work and have a normal family life. But it’s always there. It’s like a nightmare that never goes away. No matter how hard I try to push it away, his face is always there.”

Framowitz knows it won’t be easy to win the lawsuit. The three-year statute of limitations is the greatest obstacle. Others have tried circumventing it and failed. Most recently, an upstate man named John Zumpano sued a priest for allegedly repeatedly abusing him throughout much of the sixties, arguing that he was too mentally damaged to bring a case until now. The state’s highest court refused this argument. But the decision showed others one possible way around the statute: If after the abuse, a defendant keeps his accusers from suing by intimidation, the statute could perhaps be voided. Margulies’s alleged threats of reprisals against young victims, Herman argues, meet that standard.

The \$20 million price tag (\$10 million per plaintiff), Herman says, is an appropriate figure given Framowitz’s pain and suffering. (Herman’s latest settlement, in a priest case, was \$5 million.) But money isn’t all Framowitz and Herman are after, they say. They’d like Kolko dismissed from the yeshiva and kept from working with children again. They want the yeshiva to establish a fund for victims who resurface in the future. And they want the yeshiva to publicly accept responsibility for its negligence, which in all likelihood would mean disciplining or dismissing Margulies. While Kolko’s chances of returning to the yeshiva are clearly in jeopardy in light of his suspension, people who know Margulies say it’s doubtful he’d ever loosen his hold on the institution he created. “Margulies is angry and bitter about this,” says one longtime supporter. Like the powers-that-be in the Catholic Church, this source says, Margulies “doesn’t get how this crime is viewed by this society with such abhorrence. He still believes the issue can be managed, when the proper response would be to meet it head-on.”

The day his lawsuit was announced, David Framowitz visited the street in Borough Park where he and Kolko first met. He hadn’t been there in years. In the car, he saw men with black hats and *payes*, women with forties fashions. He noticed a familiar toy store on a corner and shook his head. “Nothing’s changed here,” he said. “They’re in their own little ghetto. It’s hard for them to believe that such things happen.”

He was silent for a time, then he turned toward me.

“So, you have pictures?”

At a red light, I handed him three snapshots of the rabbi, taken a few mornings earlier outside his house in Midwood. Framowitz stared at them.

“Huh. *Huh*. That’s him. The face.”

The only difference, he said, was the hair—once so red, now all white.

We arrived on the street where Framowitz had lived—57th between Fifteenth and Sixteenth Avenues. He pointed up to the third-floor balcony of a small redbrick building. “Same house, same everything,” he said.

But when we got to Kolko’s old block, there was new construction where Kolko’s house once was. “It’s not there anymore,” he mumbled, crossing the street. “It’s not there.”

Framowitz, silent for 35 years, now couldn’t stop talking.

“If they’ve known about this for 20 years or 25 years, why the cover-up? If there’s even an iota of people thinking or knowing about Kolko, why is the guy still teaching children? Why hasn’t anybody filed a complaint with the police? And why isn’t anybody filing a complaint with the D.A.’s office? If they want to take care of it the Jewish way, fine. But why haven’t they done *that*? Why aren’t people standing outside the yeshiva demonstrating? For one person getting a ticket in Borough Park, look what they did! They rioted in the streets! Jewish kids are getting harmed, and no one’s outside this school demanding an investigation? I don’t understand it. I should have done this years ago. But if I can still save some kid . . .”

He trailed off.

“He who saves one life is like saving the world. That’s what the Torah says.”