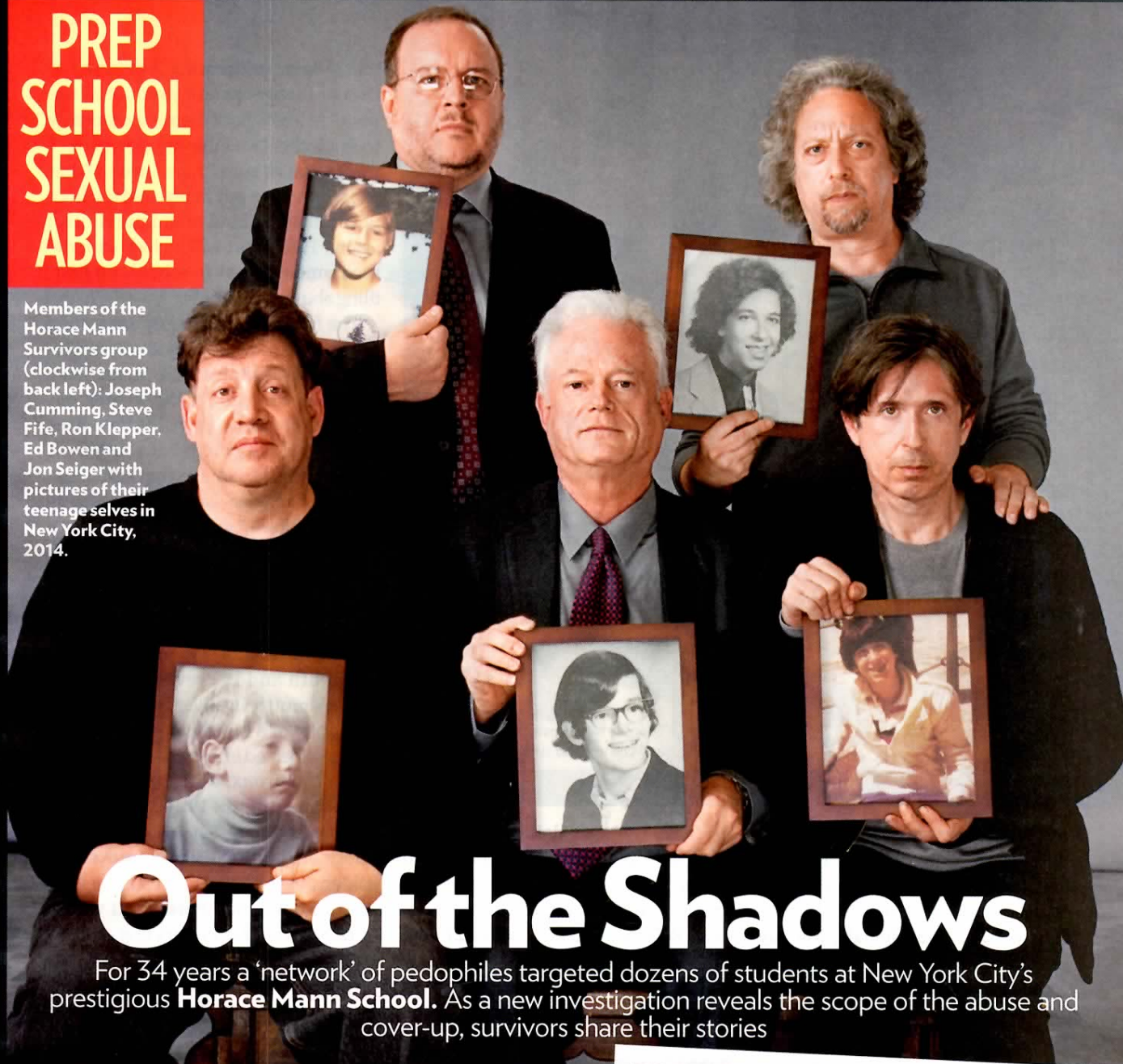


PREP SCHOOL SEXUAL ABUSE

Members of the Horace Mann Survivors group (clockwise from back left): Joseph Cumming, Steve Fife, Ron Klepper, Ed Bowen and Jon Seiger with pictures of their teenage selves in New York City, 2014.



Out of the Shadows

For 34 years a 'network' of pedophiles targeted dozens of students at New York City's prestigious **Horace Mann School**. As a new investigation reveals the scope of the abuse and cover-up, survivors share their stories

Jon Seiger was just a month into the seventh grade the first time it happened. On an overnight trip to Washington, D.C., in the fall of 1972, a teacher-chaperone put his hand in Seiger's pajamas shortly after the 11-year-old had gone to bed. "I said, 'I don't like this. I'm not comfortable,'" Seiger recalls. "He said, 'Just be a good boy and relax.'" Between that night and Seiger's 1979 graduation, he would be molested or raped, he says, "hundreds of times" by eight faculty members at Horace Mann, an elite 127-year-old New York City private school that counts members of Congress, Pulitzer Prize-winning authors, scientists and leaders of industry among its alumni. Even decades later, Seiger, 53, says, "some-

By **SHARON COTLIAR**
Photographs by **MARY ELLEN MARK**



The school's first campus, in Manhattan, early 1900s.

The Accused

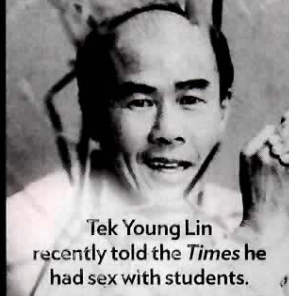
The five survivors PEOPLE spoke with—along with 34 other Horace Mann alumni—accuse these six men of sexual abuse. Sixteen other former teachers and administrators have also been named, says Peter Brooks, archivist for HMAc.



Robert Berman, now 80, denies abusing students.



Mark Wright, deceased, resigned after complaints.



Tek Young Lin recently told the *Times* he had sex with students.



R. Inslee Clark Jr., headmaster, died in 1999.



Johannes Somary retired in 2002 and died in 2011.



Stanley Kops resigned in 1983 and committed suicide in 1984.

school based on the school's determination of inappropriate conduct at the time." At least one of them subsequently took another teaching job elsewhere. "I want to make sure," says Snyder, "that procedures are put in place so a school never has that kind of unique control again." Her report will include experts' recommendations to schools on handling abuse complaints.

The five men in this story are among the first to speak publicly about surviving sexual abuse at Horace Mann. They represent a fraction of the victims, but their recollections, as well as their lives since, present a portrait of a pattern of abuse and the damage that can come from it. "I can see secrecy benefiting only the abuser," says the class of 1971's Steve Fife, 61, whose memoir of those years, *The 13th Boy*, came out last month.



Magna Est Veritas et Praevalet ("Great Is the Truth and It Prevails"): Horace Mann's motto, in silver letters, graces the lobby of a building on its 18-acre campus, located in a mansion-lined corner of the Bronx; tuition is \$43,300 a year. Named for the 19th-century Massachusetts congressman and education reformer, the school was considered "a golden ticket," says Amos Kamil, a 1982 grad who was not abused but whose 2012 *New York Times* story first exposed

three (now deceased) alleged sex offenders on staff. "There's the thought that once you're in, you're on a winning track for life, from the Ivy League to the best law firms, Wall Street. It became the perfect place for sexual abuse, which thrives anytime a kid has something to lose."

Despite the widespread abuse, victims often thought they were the lone target, a tormenting belief they held for years. "I thought I was an isolated case," says Fife, who learned differently only when he read Kamil's article. In fact, singling out the students as "special" was typical

times I can't help but think, "What the hell is wrong with me that they all picked me?" I thought it was me alone."

In reality Seiger was one of at least 63 students (five of them female) who say they were sexually abused by 22 former Horace Mann staff members between 1962 and 1996, according to a new report looking at both the abuse and its cover-up, the full findings of which are expected to be released in October.

"This was not like the horrible one person at Penn State. This was a whole network," says former Manhattan sex-crimes prosecutor and judge Leslie Crocker Snyder, who led the independent investigation for the Horace Mann Action Coalition, an alumni group formed in the wake of the revelations.

The network Snyder describes included some of the very people victims might have sought out to report abuse: a chaplain and English teacher, Tek Young Lin—who admitted in *The New York Times* in 2012 to having had sex with "maybe three" students in the

1960s and '70s, explaining, "In those days, it was very spontaneous and casual, and it did not seem really wrong"—and a headmaster and president, R. Inslee Clark Jr., with a 21-year tenure. According to HMAc research, past administrations were told about abuses 25 times but never reported any to the police.

Horace Mann's current administration, which turned down PEOPLE's requests for interviews, did not cooperate with HMAc but did participate in a 2012 investigation by the Bronx D.A. that found a "systemic pattern of alleged abuse." (No charges were filed, as the New York statute of limitations had run out; victims are calling for a change in the law.)

In a statement, Horace Mann said it "has terminated teachers from the

'This was not like the horrible one person at Penn State. This was a whole network'

—JUDGE LESLIE CROCKER SNYDER, WHO LED AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION OF THE ABUSE

of how the abuse would begin: Teachers who held idol-like sway over their young charges would identify one as deserving of extra attention.

Fife says English teacher Robert Berman “had a whole indoctrination. He lures you in with things that even one’s parents think of as positive—culture, beauty, knowledge—but soon he wants you to surrender completely to him.”

On one occasion at Berman’s home, says Fife, the teacher told him, “‘There’s a tradition of the disciples of Plato sleeping with him. I think we should sleep together.’ I said, ‘No, I couldn’t do that.’ He said, ‘What else can you do?’ I finally agreed to strip [for him]. Every aspect of this memory is horrible to me. I didn’t have the strength to walk out.”

Fife says he spoke to then-associate

‘Something I’ll carry on my conscience the rest of my life is that I did not denounce Somary, and... he went on to abuse others’

—HORACE MANN
ALUMNUS
JOSEPH CUMMING

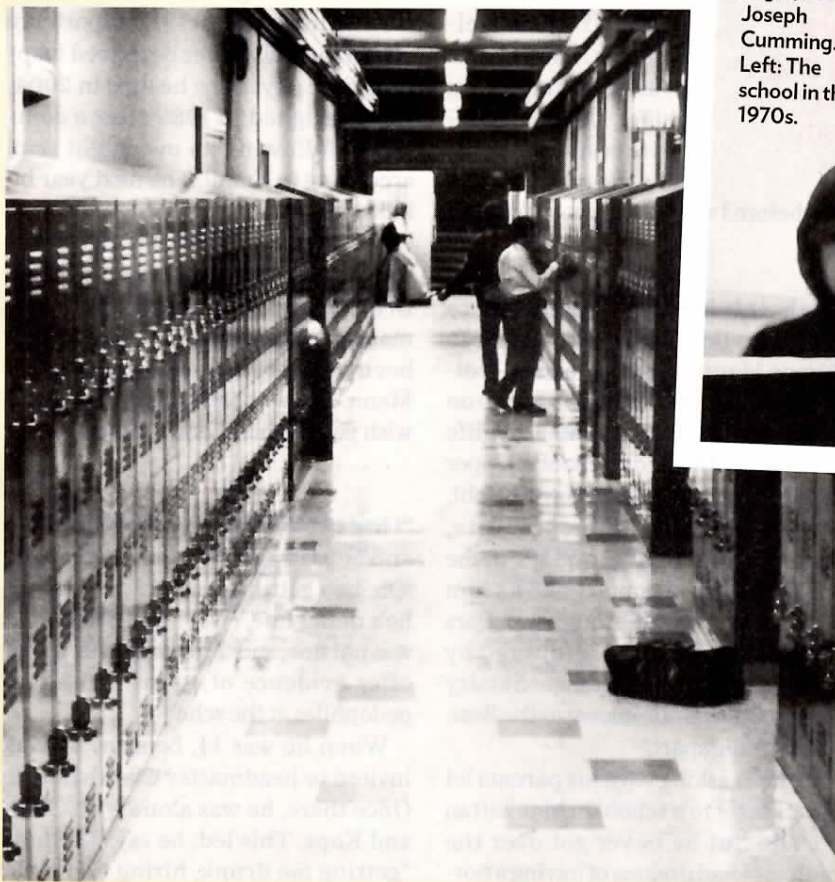
headmaster Philip Lewerth and was asked, “Do you have any evidence?” When he said he didn’t, he was advised to drop the matter. In a statement to PEOPLE, Berman, now 80, wrote that he “never ‘touched,’ ‘abused,’ ‘molested’ or otherwise behaved ‘inappropriately’ with any student. . . . The wholly unfair and false accusations have taken on a life unconnected with anything there might have been.” Berman is named by six other accusers in addition to Fife.



“Johannes Somary was my hero,” says class of 1977 alumnus Joseph Cumming of a beloved music instructor who taught for 43 years. “I couldn’t believe it

when he said, ‘You have the potential to become one of the great composers of your generation if your talent is properly nurtured, and I’m going to nurture you.’ I was over the moon,” recalls Cumming, 54, now a prominent scholar of religion and pastor of the International Church at Yale. “As that is happening, he begins touching me in a way that causes me extreme distress. When I would resist, he would say, ‘Joe, you are uptight. You need to breathe if you are going to become a great creative artist.’ Here is this man doing so much for me, I was frantically trying to find ways to explain his behavior as somehow normal in, say, the European artistic way of expressing innocent affection.”

Cumming told no one. “What kind of crappy human being would I be to ruin the reputation of this wonderful man to whom I owed so much? He helped me financially, helped me get into col-



FROM LEFT: SETH NEUBARDT; COURTESY, JOSEPH L. CUMMING



1974

Somary (right) with Joseph Cumming. Left: The school in the 1970s.

lege.” Ultimately the shame “drove me to attempt suicide” in 1977. “Something I’ll carry on my conscience the rest of my life is that I did not denounce Somary, and as a result he went on to abuse others, including Ben Balter.” Balter (class of ’94) detailed the abuse in a 1993 letter to then-head of school Philip Foote, who in 2012 told the *Times* that Somary had “strenuously denied everything” and was allowed to continue teaching until 2002. Balter com-



mitted suicide in 2009.

Somary, who was eventually named by at least 13 accusers, died in February 2011. "In March 2011 I found out I was not the only one," says Cumming, who discovered a blog, "Johannes Somary, Pedophile," created by "E.B.," who wrote that he had been molested by Somary. Ed Bowen (class of '74) started his blog in response to reverent obituaries for Somary. "He was being glorified as a great man and wonderful teacher. I couldn't take it," says Bowen, 57, an administrator with the City of New York and treasurer of the Hilltop Cares Foundation, which helps cover therapy costs for Horace Mann victims.

Cumming told Bowen, "If there are two of us, there are probably 10 of us.' I began reaching out. Some didn't return my calls, but of those who did, every one said, 'Johannes initiated sexual relations with me too.' It has been hugely significant to realize I'm not alone."

For Bowen, pointing the finger at Somary as a teen was complicated by the fact that his mother was a teacher at Horace Mann. Recently, he says, she

'I had no sense the abuse was widespread. I thought it was just me'
—STEVE FIFE,
CLASS OF 1971

told him, "I heard the rumors. I didn't think it was real." Before Somary's death, Bowen wrote to him, "Your unwelcome acts . . . have had a devastating impact on my life. . . . This contributed to years of drinking and drugging. I nearly died before I was able to get sober."



"Look, this is how it's supposed to work," says Ron Klepper, 49. "You go to Horace Mann, you go to a good [college], you make connections, you go on to whatever you do. I didn't. My life ended at 14." In middle school, Klepper says, gym and art teacher Mark Wright, himself a Horace Mann graduate, forced Klepper to have oral sex in the library. It was "the only time I let him get at me, but I went through two years of dodging touching, groping" by Wright and by history teacher Stanley Kops, another alum, known as the Bear. "I was falling apart."

Without asking why, his parents let him transfer to a school in Manhattan in 1978. But he never got over the trauma. "I had dreams of having a nor-

mal life," he says. Today, after a period of homelessness and heroin addiction, he is studying to be a substance-abuse counselor. Wright left Horace Mann over winter break in 1978, reportedly after a football player described inappropriate physicals; he died in 2004. Kops resigned in 1983 after a complaint following an overnight trip, according to Kamil. The next year he killed himself.

"I wish these people weren't dead," says Klepper, still looking for closure. In the '90s he had called former headmaster Clark at home to say he had been sexually assaulted at Horace Mann. He says Clark told him only, "I wish you the best," and hung up.



"I had two lives going: prep school boy and abused guy. My mother figured, 'Oh, he's getting good grades, I guess he's doing fine,'" says Jon Seiger. He was not fine, and the assaults he recalls offer evidence of collusion among pedophiles at the school.

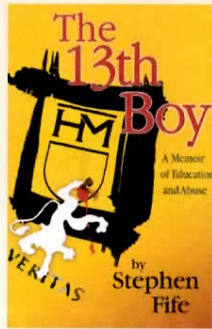
When he was 14, he says, he was invited to headmaster Clark's house. Once there, he was alone with Clark and Kops. This led, he says, to their "getting me drunk, hiring two male

LEFT: COURTESY/STEPHEN FIFE

prostitutes to rape me violently, then joining in the assault themselves.”

How had he been singled out? Seiger traces it to the day Somary (a friend of Clark’s when both were at Yale) took him to meet the headmaster. “I have run over that introduction a thousand times. There is no doubt in my mind, based on body language and the secrecy of it, that Johannes was telling Clark, ‘This is a vulnerable boy... and I think you would enjoy spending time with him.’ The next time I saw Johannes, he said, ‘I heard about the great time you had with Mr. Clark and Mr. Kops.’ The knowledge that my horrible experience was shared—I feel sick even now.”

Soon alcohol, drugs and prostitution shaped Seiger’s life outside the classroom. He says he would lie to his mother about sleeping at a friend’s house. Instead, “I’d turn tricks—make porn movies to make money for drugs and alcohol so I could forget about the stuff that was happening to me.” He managed to graduate, attended the



Fife’s book is a memoir of his time at Horace Mann.

happened. But they did...” The letter, signed by head of school Thomas Kelly and chair of the school’s board Steven Friedman, was sent to the Horace Mann community in May 2013. A field named for Inslee Clark was rechristened Main Field. And new policies—the most significant of which is a stated requirement to report suspected abuse to police—were put in place. The revelations of past abuse seem not to have hurt the school’s present reputation:

‘Great Is the Truth...’

The current Horace Mann Bronx campus (in 2013) displays its motto in a lobby.

New England Conservatory of Music, got clean in his late 20s and is now a successful jazz musician.



“We sincerely apologize for the harm that was caused by the teachers and administrators who abused anyone during their years at Horace Mann School. These unconscionable betrayals of trust never should have

2012–13 had a record number of applicants, noted Kelly. Through mediation, Horace Mann has paid roughly \$3.5 million total to about 30 victims, says a source familiar with the settlements. But for many the school’s response, says Ed Bowen, has come “out of fear. There’s hardly a trace of compassion. We’ve been treated like gold diggers.” That’s dismaying, he says, because “the school is a wonderful place. I think all of us would say, ‘So many worlds were opened to us there.’”

Kamil agrees: “It was a vibrant atmosphere with eccentric teachers coaching us, joking with us, challenging us. That’s what makes rooting out abusers so difficult: Some of the same qualities that go into making an engaging educator are the ones used to lure students and fool adults.”

By telling their stories, by pushing for an investigation into how this could have happened, the survivors hope to prevent future abuse. “People have said, ‘You’re so brave to do this, so strong.’ I don’t feel those things,” says Jon Seiger. “I’m just pissed off. They stole so much from me.” Now that he’s come out of three decades in the shadows, “it feels like I have the control, and not them.” ●

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