

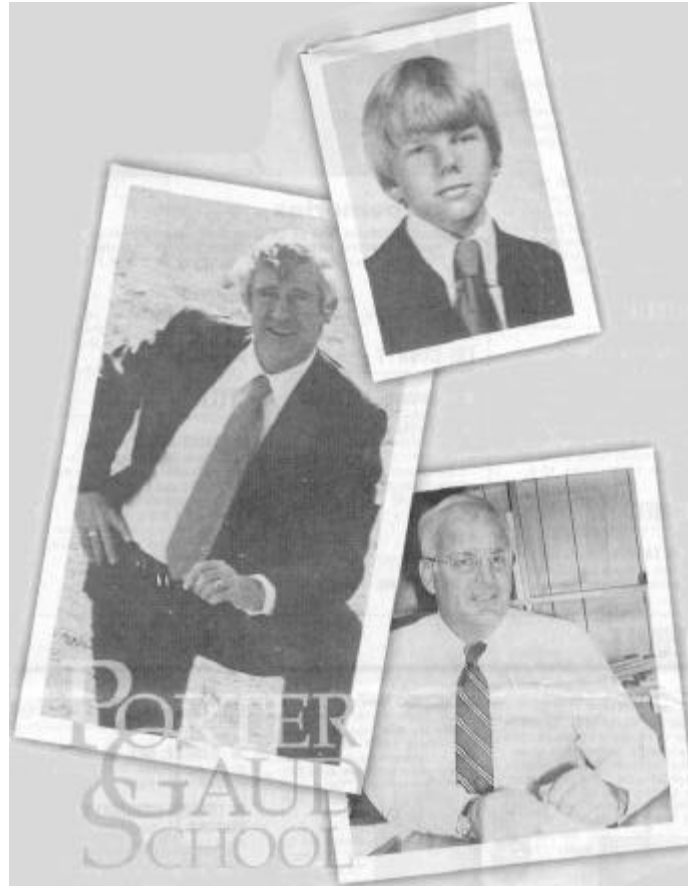
# Secret Shame

## Claims of sex abuse involve elite school

**By Tony Bartelme**  
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A 32-year-old man's decision a year ago to tell his story of sexual abuse set in motion a startling chain of events. It led to the arrest of a local teacher. It played a role in the suicide of a former principal. It has thrust the city's most prestigious private school into the spotlight as the focus of several lawsuits. And it caused local youth agencies to re-evaluate how they handle allegations of abuse.

A year after his arrest, the former teacher still waits for his day in court. He won't talk about the allegations. Neither will his lawyers nor lawyers for the defendants in the civil lawsuits. But in interviews with more than 120 people, and from sworn testimony and other public documents, a story emerges - a story about silence and shattered lives.



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On a cloudy and humid morning last April, James Bishop Alexander left Charleston, driving north, away from the questions, the lawyers, the demons destroying his peace.

Everything was in order. He had made sure of that. He was a Korean War veteran and a Citadel grad. For 36 years, he used his no-nonsense, military guise to keep kids in line at Porter-Gaud, Charleston's most prestigious co-ed private school. People called him "Major Alexander," or simply, "The Maj."

Everything was ready. He had a new will. His important legal and insurance papers were stacked in the living room of his beachfront home on the Isle of Palms. The furniture had labels saying who should get what.

One more task before he left the island, though. He stopped by his brother's house, just a few blocks away, and attached a farewell letter to the door.

That morning, April 30, Alexander was supposed to meet with a group of lawyers for a strategy session.

Six months before, 11 men and one 15-year-old boy had pressed criminal charges against a teacher, Eddie Fischer, alleging that he molested them while they were students. Some had attended James Island High, where Fischer had taught in recent years. Others had gone to Charleston's Catholic schools, where Fischer worked in the early 1960s.

But seven went to Porter-Gaud, where Fischer taught for 10 years in the 1970s and early 1980s. One ex-Porter-Gaud student, Guerry Glover, told prosecutors that he believed Fischer molested 50 boys at his school.

Glover's father was those now suing Porter-Gaud, claiming that Alexander and other Porter-Gaud employees knew Fischer was dangerous to children but did nothing to stop him, a charge denied by the school.

Attorneys for the students planned to depose Alexander in a few days.

It wouldn't be an easy deposition for Alexander, now 68 years old and retired for four years. Surely the lawyers would grill him about the recommendation he gave Fischer in 1986.

On a one-page Charleston County School District form he gave Fischer good marks. In the teaching skill category, for example, he checked off "above average."

Alexander gave the good recommendation even though he forced Fischer to resign from Porter-Gaud in 1982 after parents complained that their son was molested.

It was a messy situation - messy for Alexander and Porter-Gaud, a school born in the aftermath of the Civil War, the school of choice for many of the city's most prominent citizens.

After leaving the note at his brother's house, he drove north.

In his white Honda Accord, he most likely headed toward Conway, crossing the border into North Carolina, passing swamps and freshly planted tobacco fields. One hour. Two hours. Small town after small town. He probably drove through tiny Tabor City and then Whiteville, a tobacco town 30 miles north of the border.

Just outside Whiteville is a crossroads. To the left was Whiteville Memorial Cemetery, to the right, a dead - end dirt road called Alligator Run. He steered onto the dirt road, which snakes around a field and into a wooded area. He turned the car around and parked. Looking left, he would have seen a patch of adolescent pines blocking traffic on Route 701; to the right were bushes and an earthen dike hiding the view from the field.

He placed a note in a plastic bag. "I am James Alexander..." He wrapped an identical handwritten note around his wallet. It was about noon now. He grabbed a big blue blanket and put it over his head and chest. Underneath the blanket, Alexander's right hand pointed an automatic pistol at his chest. He pulled the trigger.

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Two months later, Guerry Glover, 32, sat on a sofa in his living room and pondered Alexander's death. He holds the anger like a clenched fist. What Alexander knew will never be told now. A little bit of truth also died under that blue blanket. Glover believes Alexander and others at Porter-Gaud knew about Fischer. And if they didn't, they should have.

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A handful of tomatoes. That's about how big Guerry was when he was born. Just three pounds or so, the baby in the family, born when his mother was 38.

Harold and Evelyn Glover didn't think their boy would live. Back in 1965, premature babies didn't have much of a chance. But the baby came out eating, and he didn't stop, and pretty soon, he had a shock of downy white hair.

A quiet boy, he didn't talk until he was 3 years old. But, oh so adorable. Mrs. Glover and her friends took to calling him, "Precious Angel Sweetheart Darling Baby.,

The Glovers lived on John's Island, in a two-story brick house shaded by an old pine on one side and huge live oak on the other. The house was at the end of a straight, half-mile dirt driveway bisecting a 20-acre field used to grow cucumbers and other vegetables.



Eddie Fischer (right) and Guerry Glover are pictured in the den of Glover's home shortly after the abuse allegedly began.

Harold mainly farmed tomatoes. He is a wiry, quiet man, short of stature, with skin seasoned and sun-dried. He has the slow smile and calm voice of someone who has the patience to watch things grow through droughts and good weather. His close friend, now deceased, was the Rev. Edward B. Guerry, rector at St. John's Episcopal Church. A descendant of revolutionary war hero Maj. Gen. William Moultrie, Guerry was one of Charleston's most prominent Episcopal ministers. A trustee of Porter Military Academy, he was largely responsible for keeping the institution alive through several financial crises in the 1950s. He baptized Guerry in the hospital, and the Glovers were proud to name their new baby after him.

Porter-Gaud. There was never any doubt that the Glovers would send their children there.

The Rev. Anthony Toomer Porter founded the school in 1867 after he visited Magnolia Cemetery to grieve for his deceased son. Amid the tombstones and gnarled live oaks, Porter heard a voice: "Stop grieving for the dead and do something for the living." The voice told him to build a school for boys orphaned in the Civil War.

So he opened Porter Military School, charging those who could pay 50 cents a month, or a sack of potatoes. Over the years, the school grew, eventually merging in the early 1960s with two other private schools, the Gaud School and Watt School.

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It turned out to be a parents dream come true, this school. Little Guerry loved his first-grade teacher, Mrs. Clara Snowden. She took him to get Krispy Kreme doughnuts. At the end of the year, she wrote in his yearbook: "You are one of my boys. Always stay as nice as you are now, Love, Mrs. Snowden."

The Glovers socialized with the teachers, even took vacations with them. Porter-Gaud was like family. Teachers took students on field trips to the Glovers' farm, Guerry proudly showing off the fields to classmates more familiar with homes with high ceilings and manicured gardens. Teachers organized Easter egg hunts in the hay fields, let kids ride on Harold's huge combine. Guerry's older brother, Lee, became such good friends with James Bishop Alexander, principal of the upper school, that he asked him to be in his wedding.

So, the Glovers suspected nothing when a Porter-Gaud teacher named Eddie Fischer volunteered to drive their daughter, Ethel, a cheerleader, home after summer football practices. After all, he was the team trainer, and a popular teacher, and wasn't it great that someone would take care of their daughter?

This teacher was a bit of a braggart, though, Harold thought. Always talking. So full of himself. He greeted Fischer when he stopped by those nights and then went on his way.

The year was 1975. Late August. The tomato crop was in. Guerry, sunburned and freckled, was about to enter the fifth grade. He was small and shy, like his dad.

One of Guerry's most vivid memories then is of Fischer driving out to a beach house the family had rented on Edisto Island. Fischer had an orange Porsche 911, and he bragged how he topped 90 mph. Yeah, Mr. Fischer was cool, he thought.

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Fischer cut quite a figure. His sharp features -the prominent jaw and nose, the thick, closely cropped gray hair - and his 6-foot frame seemed to give him an air of authority.

Fischer's roots in Charleston stretched back several generations. His father ran the family's lumber company, A.H. Fischer Co., off Morrison Drive. He graduated from The Citadel in 1950. By then he had already established himself as a talker. In his senior yearbook, he was named "Best Bullshooter."

When Fischer was in his late 20s, his family disintegrated. His mother died in 1954. His father committed suicide in 1956.

In 1957, Fischer inherited an estate worth \$114,094. Soon, he was living in a large house in the West Ashley neighborhood of Northbridge Terrace, driving a big blue Cadillac with a white vinyl top - and teaching at Bishop England, a private Catholic high school in downtown Charleston.

Former Congressman Tommy Hartnett attended Bishop England at that time. One night after a basketball game, Fischer offered to drive him home. It was late about 10:15 p.m. - but his mother and father welcomed the teacher and offered him some coffee. Fischer talked and talked the whole night, Hartnett recalled. His parents went to sleep. "I sat there listening to him until 4:30 in the morning!" Hartnett said. "Finally I said, 'Look it's 4:30 in the morning.' It was a little strange."

After a year at Bishop England, Fischer moved to Sacred Heart, a Catholic elementary school. He taught there for three years. It's not clear why he left in 1963 the diocese says it has no records of his departure - or what he did for four years afterward.

But by 1972, after a four - year stint coaching basketball at Rivers Middle School, he was at Porter-Gaud. He taught science and history, coached basketball and was the school's disciplinarian - the principal's designated enforcer of rules and punishment.

As a teacher, he got mixed reviews. A supervisor said in a 1975 evaluation: "Eddie has made a hit with the seventh grade class. His discipline is good. His attitude is one of cooperation on all levels."

Another supervisor, however, said: "Very frankly, I think this about Mr. Fischer: He is not a scholar by any stretch of the imagination, and he is lazy in his class preparation. Furthermore, I don't think he is very literate, and I think he is a bit of a confidence man."

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To the Glovers, though, he was part of the Porter-Gaud family, a firm, albeit talkative, father figure for their towheaded, 10-year-old boy.

And, when he stopped by the farmhouse one night in September 1975, the Glovers felt comfortable asking Fischer to stay overnight.

Glover's memory is vague about whether Fischer said anything when he came into his bedroom that night.

But he clearly remembers that Fischer sat down on the bed next to him, started rubbing his thighs.

For Glover, Wednesday nights during seventh and eighth grades were a blur of pretty girls wearing white gloves and white dresses, of well-scrubbed boys wearing blue blazers and ties.

Wednesday night was when he went to cotillion, at the South Carolina Society Hall on Meeting Street.

Many of the boys and girls who went to cotillion were students at Porter-Gaud and Ashley Hall, an all-girls school. Since he lived so far out in the country on John's Island, his parents let Eddie Fischer pick him up after school and drive him to Society Hall.

Cotillion didn't start for several hours, so Fischer took the boy to his two - story, brick town house near Colonial Lake. Inside, Glover would say years later in court documents, he and the teacher would perform oral sex on each other.

Glover said he had sex hundreds of times -including times in Fischer's office at Porter-Gaud and at a home on Sullivan's Island that belonged to one of Fischer's friends. When he was 14, his parents had a St. Patrick's Day party in the backyard. Glover remembers being upstairs in the bedroom - with its National Geographic posters and 70s-era orange shag carpet and looking down at all the people in the back yard as Fischer pulled down his clothes, (Later, when Fischer was questioned about these and other allegations in a deposition, he declined to respond to any, citing his Fifth Amendment rights.)

All the while, Glover recalls, Fischer kept reassuring him that what they were doing was normal, that they should keep what they were doing secret, "When people say 'Why didn't you talk about that?' ... Well it's just not something ... how do you ... where do you get the words to talk about that? If I can't get the words as a 32-year-old, how do you do that as a sixth grader?"

Over time, Glover says he learned that other boys, including classmates, shared his secret. "For some reason, Mr. Fischer made me his confidant," Glover would say later in a sworn affidavit. "He would show me Polaroid pictures that he had taken. He had a big bag of them." The photos were of students on Fischer's bed with no clothes on. One day, Glover says, Fischer bragged that he "did five in one day." Five boys.

Glover started drinking. He smoked marijuana -in the parking lot before school, in friends' downtown homes after school let out. In fifth grade, he was one of the school's best students; three years later he was one of the worst.

But, Glover would say later in a sworn deposition, the more he tried to get away from Fischer, the more he seemed drawn into his web. One day in eighth grade, he and two other boys tossed eggs at a woman's house on Tradd Street. They were caught and ordered to clean Porter-Gaud's classrooms.

In walked Fischer, he said, and told the principal that he had something for Glover to do at his house. Later that day, Glover remembers, he ended up on Fischer's bed, naked.

On Good Friday when he was in 10th grade, Guerry decided it was all too much. He tells of climbing onto the roof over his bedroom, tying a rope around his neck and a thick branch from the old live oak next to the house. Then he turned around. Someone was driving fast down the long dirt driveway to the house.

It was Fischer, in his orange Porsche.

He's not sure why he didn't jump off the roof that day. All he remembers is his mother screaming, Fischer looking concerned and saying he would take care of things. He remembers feeling a deep, aching sense of resignation as Fischer helped him into his Porsche and drove to his home downtown.

Glover's mother remembers that day. "You have to understand that we cared for Mr. Fischer," she said, her voice trembling, "and we thought of him as a good authority figure for our boy,"

After the suicide attempt, Glover continued his slide at school. He failed his classes and lied about a homework project. His teachers knew something was wrong.

"Guerry has not been happy at Porter-Gaud," his Spanish teacher wrote in an evaluation. "I think his unhappiness has contributed to his poor grades."

One morning in the spring of 1982, Alexander phoned the Glovers.

Guerry was a discipline problem. He was disrupting other students.

He would have to leave the school.

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About 800 children attend Porter-Gaud, which sits on a bend of the Ashley River, just across the bridge to downtown Charleston. Its campus is a collection of 60s- and 70s-era brick buildings, but the bland architecture belies a school that, by some measures, rivals the best in the nation.

Tuition, fees and other expenses are high -about \$9,000 a year. And so are its test scores. Its SAT average - 1274 - is higher than nationally known Phillips Exeter Academy, and it has a higher percentage of National Merit Scholars than Choate and Andover. Graduating seniors often end up at Harvard, Duke and other top colleges.

The list of alumni includes many successful members of Charleston's legal, medical and business establishments. In 1995, the school began a five-year, \$5.5 million fund-raising campaign for new buildings and landscaping. In just three years, the school raised \$7 million.

Much of the school's growth happened during the tenure of former headmaster Berkeley Grimball, who retired in 1988. An outspoken man, Grimball steered the school through its merger with the Gaud and Watt schools in the 1960s and pushed for the school to go co-ed in the early 1970s.

Fischer arrived at Porter-Gaud in the 1972 school year. Sometime after his arrival, the school received a complaint about Fischer, according to a former student. The student, who was in the eighth grade at the time, remembers Fischer asking him to sneak out of

the house and meet him at a drug store at the South Windermere shopping center. He said Fischer suggested that he knew women who would pay to have sex with kids.

"I never went," the boy would remember 26 years later, "and I was too embarrassed to tell my parents."

He told his brother, who went to the shopping center and saw Fischer looking as if he were waiting for someone. The brother then told his parents.

Anger fills the former student's voice today. He asks that his name not be used here because his children go to Porter-Gaud and because he worries that people will think he was molested.

"If nothing else, he told a child to do something against his parents' wishes," the former student said. "Berkeley Grimball knew all this."

Grimball declined to comment for this story, but in a sworn deposition, he estimated that the first complaint against Fischer happened much later. According to Grimball, the boy's father called him. The father was upset that Fischer was meeting his son at a local drugstore supposedly to help with his lessons. The father said "he had observed the situation in the drugstore and felt like it was ... more of a social call, and that he didn't want that particular relationship to continue with Fischer."

Grimball said he called Fischer into his office and confronted him with the situation. "He denied it," Grimball recalled. "And I told him at the time that if I heard anything more from this parent about his actions with his son, that I would ask for his resignation."

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Bump into someone who went to Porter-Gaud in the 1970s and early 1980s, and there's a good chance they'll know the standing joke about Fischer.

"If you hurt your arm and were sent to see Eddie Fischer, he would tell you to drop your drawers," said Ellison Berlin, a former classmate of Glover who now runs a restaurant supply company. "One time he wanted to show me how to check for a hernia. I told him if I had a problem, I'd let someone know."

"It was a joke to us," said another classmate, Charles Bishop. "I was playing football and soccer, and you would go over there to get your ankle wrapped, and the first thing he'd say is 'Drop your drawers.' The way he said it was weird. He always had a little cough."

Paul Gwyn, a former student, said people used to call Fischer "Sweet Eddie."

Stephen Colbert, a classmate and close friend of Glover's then, remembers feeling sick to his stomach one day and being sent to Fischer's office, which had a door and no windows.

"He checked me for a hernia. He said, 'Turn your head and cough.' And he was thorough. I'm 16, and I'm thinking to myself, 'I just don't see how it could be a hernia.' But he's the trainer. It was so clinical. He says, 'No I don't think it's hernia. You know what, go to the nurse's office and get an aspirin.'"

Colbert remembers an assembly during his senior year when someone went on stage and did an imitation of Fischer asking a boy to drop his pants. Everyone laughed. "There was no embarrassed hush."

Colbert, a writer for The Daily Show on the Comedy Central channel, said that while the jokes were common, people didn't really think that an older man might be having sex with boys. "They didn't make that connection. There was the sense that 'there's crazy Mr. Fischer,' not 'Hey, that guy's a pedophile.'"

"But if this story is true, there is a large segment of people who live in downtown Charleston, who work with each other every day and share a common secret that they're desperately trying to hide. There's a tremendous wound in the community that has never been addressed."

None of the students' wisecracks apparently made it onto the administrators' radar screens.

"No one ever came to me, and I wish they had," said Ted Richardson, a former Porter-Gaud principal now living in Hawaii. "And I don't think Mr. Grimball would cover anything up."

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In the spring of 1982, Porter-Gaud received a second complaint about Fischer.

"He (Alexander) told me a parent had called," Grimball recounted recently in a sworn deposition, "and said that Mr. Fischer had taken (his son) to his house, shown him pornographic materials and made a sexual pass at him. And at that point, I said, 'Well, I hope you have gotten Mr. Fischer's resignation.'" He said Alexander responded that he did.

On May 31, 1982, Fischer wrote Grimball: "Please accept my resignation as of today for personal reasons. I can never put into words how much Porter-Gaud has meant to me these past 11 years. Thank you for everything."

Ten days later, Grimball typed a letter to Fischer on his Smith-Corona.

"Dear Eddie, I was genuinely sorry that your career with the school ended the way, it did, for you certainly deserve credit for accomplishing many positive things for the good of the school and the students throughout the years you were on the faculty of Porter-Gaud.

"It is my hope that something good will come out this experience and you will take positive steps to insure that nothing like it will ever happen in your life again.

"Let me know if I can ever be of any help in anything."

In Grimball's deposition, Glover's lawyer, David Flowers of Greenville, asked why he didn't call the police. Grimball responded that, "the way I looked at it at the time, this was a school problem."

The student's parents, he added, wanted to protect their son's privacy and urged school officials to keep everything confidential.

Asked what he wanted Fischer to do to make sure nothing happened again, Grimball responded:

"Well, I would hope that he would get counseling, psychiatric counseling, whatever these people have to go through with to get more or less emotionally cured, away, from their sexual proclivities."

Why, Flowers asked, didn't he fire Fischer, instead of letting him resign?

"Well, I didn't mean to ruin the guy's career for the rest of time, assuming that he'd straighten himself out.

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It didn't take Fischer long to find another job.

That summer he applied to College Prep, a much smaller private school in downtown Charleston that has since merged with Mason Prep. The school's new headmaster then was Thomas Farm.

Farm remembers asking Fischer why he left Porter-Gaud. "I forgot what reason he gave me, but I felt that I had a good feel for interviewing people."

Farin also recalls that Alexander came to see him and toured the College Prep campus. Farm said he doesn't remember discussing the circumstances of Fischer's resignation with Alexander. "He certainly never gave me any reason not to hire Mr. Fischer."

And, Fischer fit in well at the school.

After his first year, the senior class dedicated the yearbook to him, writing that Fischer "grasped and projected the mystic (sic) of College Prep at its best."