

NEW YORK

# On the Rabbi's Knee

**Do the Orthodox Jews have a Catholic-priest problem?**

By **Robert Kolker**



Rabbi Yehuda Kolko, outside his Brooklyn home.  
(Photo: Christopher Anderson/Magnum)

**'D**oes 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.