



# What They Did to the Kid: Confessions of an Altar Boy, A Tale of Priest Abuse

*Jack Fritscher*

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"What They Did to the Kid" is a memoir spinning as a comic novel for general-fiction readers intrigued by boys' school tales, and baby boomers who "survived Catholic school." Ryan O'Hara, coming of age from 14 to 24, is the wise adolescent narrating readers' entry into the secret culture of 1950's altar boys who go to the seminary, meet priests, and must decide their own identities. The novel's interior ticking covers the clock and calendar of boys' emerging consciences and edgy consciousness. "The San Francisco Chronicle" says, "Jack Fritscher reads gloriously." Strong characters and snappy dialog propel the character-driven plot of male-dominant pecking order. At Misericordia Seminary (aptly nicknamed "Misery"), Ryan O'Hara exposes his own story. He's trapped for oxygen-with 500 other boys-by the imperial Rector Karg, the disciplinarian Father Gunn "of the USMC," the tart Father Polistina, and the rebel-priest Chris Dryden "who knows Fellini and JFK." The storytelling Irish-American author gives each ensemble character-hero or villain, student or priest, man or woman-a rich back story. Black civil rights of the 60's as well as three interesting women characters open this tale out of the suffocating seminary and on to the hot streets of Chicago's South Side and Old Town. The compelling psychological drama hinges on the very source and aspirations of priestly vocation versus self-esteem. "Is God calling me-and what about chastity? Or is it just the 'Bali Hai' of blind ambition and social climbing-and what about sex?" Fritscher makes deeper than usual sense of soulful coming-of-age material. The hearty supply of boarding school episodes cumulatively reveals the dueling dynamic between the boyish protagonist, Ryan O'Hara, and the callous ambition of the handsome bully, Tank Rimsky, as they fight toward the finish line of "manly men's" ordination to the priesthood. "The hardest thing to be in America today is a man." The novel is based on an under-reported story: the Catholic Church recruited 200,000 boys into seminaries in the 1950's. Only 20,000 were ordained. "Kid" details, in a nostalgic and not unkind take what happened to the missing 180,000 boys and the women and men in their families. Daring to step inside Catholic culture, without being parochial, this American story reveals the 1950's roots of 21st-century "recovering Catholic" panic and angst. The millions of post-Catholic baby boomers who have exited the Church will compare notes and laugh knowingly at the dead-on characterizations. Fashionably anti-Catholic campers will say, "but, of course!" Readers might catalog "Kid" in the genre of "Young Torless, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," and "Lord of the Flies." Before now, no one of the surviving 180,000 ex-seminarians has dared reveal this insider confession on the secret milieu of the Catholic education of priests. From interviews with more than a hundred former seminarians, Jack Fritscher uniquely stages their true story arcs with wit, verve, and comedy. "What They Did to the Kid" is the fourth novel from Jack Fritscher whose twelve books have sold more than 100,000 copies. Jack Fritscher is a graduate of the prestigious Pontifical College Josephinum, a Roman Catholic seminary, located in Columbus, Ohio, and directly subject to the Vatican in Rome. He received his doctorate in American Literature from Loyola University, Chicago.

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