



Royal Commission  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

## Statement

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**Name** Lola Florence WALL  
**Address** Known to Royal Commission  
**Occupation** Retired  
**Date** 12<sup>th</sup> September 2014

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1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. Where direct speech is referred to in this statement, it is provided in words or words to the effect of those which were used, to the best of my recollection.
3. My full name is Lola Florence WALL and I was born in 1939. I am 75 years old. I married Norman WALL in 1961. Prior to my marriage, my name was Lola WILLIAMS.

### **Becoming child care workers at the Retta Dixon Home**

4. My husband, Norman, and I are Christians and felt called by God to do some mission work. About 1971 we were living in Budgewoi, NSW, and we saw an advertisement in a Baptist newspaper or magazine advertising for people to work as House Parents at the Retta Dixon Home (**Retta Dixon**) in Darwin. Retta Dixon was a child care facility caring for mostly part-Aboriginal children who had been made wards of the state, though there were some children placed there voluntarily by parents in an effort to get their children to go to school. The Home was run by the Aborigines Inland Mission (**AIM**), funded by Government welfare. Norman and I submitted an application but the application was misplaced.

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5. In 1972 we were in contact with Mr COLLINS at AIM headquarters in Sydney. A little while later we travelled to Concord, in Sydney, to the AIM office where we met Mervyn PATTEMORE, the Superintendent of Retta Dixon. We were accepted as child care workers to be House Parents at Retta Dixon.
  6. In March 1973, Norman, myself, and our three children, a daughter aged nine, a son aged seven, and a son aged two, left the Central Coast of NSW and moved to Retta Dixon. We were placed as the House Parents for Cottage 5.
  7. I don't recall receiving any training in relation to working at Retta Dixon. Later on we were given a book outlining the role, duties and rules of our position. Regular discussions with other House Parents and the weekly meetings gave us further information about our role and duties at Retta Dixon.
  8. Norman and I had some experience that was relevant to our position at Retta Dixon. My dad who cared for me growing up was Aboriginal. There were also other Aboriginal relatives on both my and Norman's side of the family. Norman had been in the army, following which he worked for Liverpool City Council. We attended Liverpool Baptist Church where Norman was the Warrant Officer in the local church Boys' Brigade. Norman and I also worked with church people who ran a kiosk at holiday cabins on the Central Coast of NSW. Norman worked for three years at Mt Penang Boys Home near Gosford. I had experience in religious instruction at school with my church Minister and his wife in Grafton.
  9. Whilst living and working at Retta Dixon, Norman and I received an allowance of \$17 each, but I can't recall if it was weekly or fortnightly. Our food and accommodation were included as part of the conditions of our work.

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**Life at Retta Dixon**

10. Retta Dixon consisted of the main residence, where the PATTEMORE family lived, and eight cottages, where the children in care lived. Each cottage had a House Parent or Parents. When we arrived the other House Parents were Gwen PLATT, Judy FERGUSON, David and Beryl BARNES, Don and Barbara HENDERSON, Milton and Ruth WILLIAMS, Ethel McKAY, Ms SHANKLETON, and Ms SPOHN. Dawn ELLIOTT lived and worked at Retta Dixon in the office.
11. In Cottage 5, we had about ten children in our care. I remember some of the children we cared for whilst at Retta Dixon were Fred BEDGEGOOD, Mercia HUDDLESTON, Rhonda and Jack CLANCY, David and Andrina PETRICK, Mervyn CAMPBELL, Jeffrey and Dennis WINSLEY, Leanne KUNOTH and Jeffrey, Lesley, John and Sandra WATERS.
12. Each of the cottages was like a self-contained house. There were bedrooms, kitchen, lounge and dining area, and a big playroom. There was also a laundry and bathroom facilities for each cottage. We looked after the children in our care, completed all the domestic duties such as cleaning, washing, preparing meals, ensuring the children completed homework, sewing school uniforms, and also maintenance and outside work like mowing the grass. The children were expected to help with the chores in accordance with their age and what they could do. For example, the older children were expected to do the washing up after dinner.
13. The children would attend church on Sundays. They also would attend Sunday school and there was a girls' brigade and boys club. Norman and I would sometimes take the children out of the Home, after notifying Mr PATTEMORE. I remember taking children to Kununurra in Western Australia so Mercia could visit her father, and taking Leanne to Alice Springs to visit family. In school holidays I remember taking the

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younger children to the Retta Dixon camp site at Lee Point for a camping holiday, whilst the older children went to Coomalie Creek. We also took the children to Katherine to go swimming and fishing.

14. The children attended the local schools. I remember children going to either Rapid Creek Primary School, Nightcliff Primary School, or Millner Primary School, and when they were older, Nightcliff High School. Usually Norman, or one of the other House Parents, would drive the children to school in the Retta Dixon bus, and then pick them up again at the end of the school day.

15. Mr PATTEMORE, as the Superintendent of Retta Dixon, was responsible for the day to day management of the Home. He looked after the budget, employment of House Parents, and liaising with AIM and any Government agencies. Mr PATTEMORE was also responsible for overall control within the Home. As House Parents, we would discipline the children ourselves, sometimes giving them a smack if required. Sometimes we would send the children to Mr PATTEMORE for him to speak with them and for him to know what was going on. I think he always had their best interests at heart.

16. House Parents were entitled to a full day off every fortnight, and a part day off every alternate week. Norman and I had our day off every second Thursday. On these days the children from our cottage would be dispersed amongst the other cottages for the day and we would get them back at 8:00pm. At these times the children from different cottages got to mix with each other. Sometimes, the children from different cottages would play games and sport on the oval together.

17. In 1974, Retta Dixon was badly damaged by Cyclone Tracy. On Boxing Day, about 60 of the people from Retta Dixon, including children and House Parents, left Darwin for Batchelor, a town to the South of Darwin. The PATTEMORES remained in Darwin

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so Norman was placed in charge of everyone at Batchelor. From Batchelor we went to Katherine, then to Tindal Air Force Base where we were evacuated to Adelaide, then on to Sydney, staying at Blackheath in the Blue Mountains. I think we stayed there for about six weeks. At this time Gwen PLATT became ill and went on leave. Andy and Thelma GOUGH joined us at Blackheath and took on the responsibility of most of the children from Gwen's cottage. Norman and I took responsibility for some as well. We then travelled back to Darwin, then to Batchelor again where we stayed at the Batchelor Vocational Training Centre. The accommodation consisted of dormitory-style buildings with the boys sleeping along one side of the building, and girls on the other. The House Parents remained responsible for their own children at Batchelor.

18. I believe that the Welfare Department was informed that we took the children to Sydney following the evacuation of Darwin due to Cyclone Tracy. There was a substantial amount of organising that had been done to arrange the evacuation flights, accommodation and support that we had and I don't believe this could have been achieved without the Welfare Department and AIM head office helping out.

19. I recall during our time at Retta Dixon, there were occasional visits by Welfare Officers. I specifically recall an older, more efficient, lady coming to check on Rhonda CLANCY, a child in our cottage. She would talk with Rhonda on her own in the play room at the front of the cottage. There was also a younger lady who did not seem as helpful and was trying to arrange for Rhonda to leave Retta Dixon to live with her.

**Reports of sexual abuse by Don HENDERSON**

20. Six weeks after I arrived at Retta Dixon, I was standing with some of the girls at the front fence of the Home. The girls were talking about Don HENDERSON and how he was behaving inappropriately with some of the boys. I spoke to Norman about it and

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discovered some of the boys had also spoken to him. We decided to report the matter to Mr PATTEMORE.

21. I recall that a short time later, Mr Arthur COLLINS, the AIM Mission Secretary from Sydney, arrived at Retta Dixon. I was later informed by Mr COLLINS that there was not enough evidence against Don HENDERSON to take any action. I do not know if the matter was reported to Police or if any of the children were spoken to about the alleged abuse. As far as I am aware, nothing else happened and Don HENDERSON continued to be a House Parent.

22. Norman and I were very wary around Don HENDERSON, and very watchful in relation to the children in our care. HENDERSON was a very tall, friendly man but his manner at times seemed overbearing.

23. When we were all living at Batchelor in 1975, Ethel MCKAY approached Norman one day asking if she and HENDERSON could take their children on a camping trip to Tortilla Flats. There was a farm at Tortilla Flats owned by the SULLIVANS where we could go and camp with the children. Norman was hesitant and told Ethel he didn't think it was a good idea, however, I remember that they did go.

24. The morning after they left, a Saturday, Ethel came to Norman and me. She was really upset and asked us to take her and her children to Darwin. Norman and I were planning on going to the Retta Dixon site in Darwin anyway. Ethel did not tell us why she wanted to go, but Norman and I guessed it was in relation to HENDERSON and the possibility that he had abused some of the children.

25. Norman and I, our children, Ethel, and her children then went to Darwin. The PATTEMORES were still at Retta Dixon and the Home was being rebuilt. Ethel and her children then went to see the PATTEMORES. Later that day Ethel asked to see

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Norman and me. She told us she was sorry for going on the trip to Tortilla Flats against the advice of Norman. I believe Ethel became aware of inappropriate behaviour by HENDERSON. I don't recall exactly what happened, but I know the matter was then reported to the Police by Mr PATTEMORE.

26. Norman and I returned to Batchelor and I remember the Police coming late in the evening to speak with HENDERSON. I think it was the same day. I don't know if the Police spoke to any of the children. I remember one of the young girls, REDACTED from HENDERSON's cottage, coming to me and talking about HENDERSON abusing one of the other little girls at their cottage, AJW

27. I don't recall any more about the Police investigation or what happened, except that the HENDERSONS left Retta Dixon very shortly after. I believe they stayed in Darwin, at least for a while. I never saw HENDERSON abuse any children whilst at Retta Dixon or at Batchelor.

28. We continued to care for the children and prepared for the move back to the Retta Dixon site in Darwin. We moved back in December 1975. We were the last House Parents to move back to the Retta Dixon site as we waited for the end of the school year.

29. A court matter about the child abuse was held in 1976. Norman drove some of the children, and Ethel, to the court house. I think there were about six children who were giving evidence in the matter. I remember two of them were AKM and AKN

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30. Norman told me at the time that as he and the children approached the court and were getting out of the car, they saw HENDERSON standing on the street with some older boys from Retta Dixon. He told me that the older boys spoke to the younger

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children but Norman didn't know what was said. After this the younger children would not speak about the matter and would not give their evidence in the court.

31. I understand that HENDERSON was acquitted of the charges against him. The prosecution lawyer, I don't remember his name, came to Retta Dixon after the trial to apologise for what had happened. He stated that HENDERSON should never have been allowed to stand near the car and the children should have been better cared for during the court process. He also stated that HENDERSON was acquitted because some of the children wouldn't give evidence against him.

32. I remember that after the HENDERSONS had left Retta Dixon, Don HENDERSON came for a visit one time. I don't know why he came but he acted as though nothing had happened.

#### **Leaving Retta Dixon**

33. Norman and I continued to work at Retta Dixon. By the early 1980's the Government policy in relation to neglected children had changed from taking them and placing them in foster care, to keeping them with their families and supporting the family unit. Norman and I continued to work at Retta Dixon after this change as we had a private boarding arrangement, looking after children who came from rural areas to Darwin to attend Marrara Christian School. Norman was also responsible for maintenance at the Retta Dixon site.

34. We stayed at Retta Dixon until the end of 1985 at which time we moved to Alice Springs and took up positions as missionaries at the AIM Aboriginal missions. We remained there for 21 years, moving back to Darwin in 2007. In 2012 we moved to Adelaide where we currently reside.

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**Desired outcomes from the Royal Commission**

35. I think it is important that carers working with children receive training in how to communicate with and identify children who are being abused, and how to deal with any situation where children are, or have been, abused. I believe Norman's experience working in the Boys Home made him aware of the possibility of these things happening and that is why he became concerned about HENDERSON.

36. When we applied to work at Retta Dixon we were not required to provide any information about past criminal history or any allegations involving abusing children. I know that today there is a requirement for people to complete Working With Children Checks, and it is important that people are properly investigated for previous offences or wrong behaviour around children.

Signed: L.F. Wall

Date: 12th September 2014

Witness: AD Wall

Date: 12/9/14

LOLA FLORENCE WALL

Signature: L.F. Wall

Witness: AD Wall