

Supplementary statement in the matter of Satyananda Ashram Case Study 21

Statement from APR

- a. My mother was given tasks by Shishy such as creating gifts for us children. She was expected to do this on top of an already overwhelming workload. She is very creative and put her heart and soul into the gifts. Shishy, of course, took all the credit each time.
- b. The conditions of sick bay and the awful experiences I had there (and I was there a lot) are frequently in my nightmares. It was a cold room in the coldest part of the Ashram, with no heating and drafts from gaps in the door. I was terrified in that room.
- c. Also there was a culture among the adults which my mum passed down to me that when you are sick you “burn” through the sickness with physical labour instead of resting. To this day I have a hard time resting even when I am seriously ill.
- d. All of the children were featured in Yoga poses in a book my mum put together called Yoga for the Young. It was also filled with our poems, drawings and stories. Shishy was the hero of most of these writings, and of course, took the credit for the books success.
- e. Her voice was the most captivating thing about her to me. I was so excited when some of us kids were able to be involved in recording an album called Where Sound Becomes Vision. On this tape you can hear beautiful songs of devotion including one Shishy wrote about us children. I find it chilling to think about the lyrics when I contrast it with how she was in real life.
- f. I remember NOT wanting to be initiated.
- g. I found out later that my mum had not been worried about me because they were gay. I have strange memories from these times but they are not clear. More like a sick feeling. Another man my mother allowed me to spend time with and even leave the ashram with was a man who had been in gaol. I never understood why he paid me so much attention, other than we shared the same birthday. He visited year after year, bringing expensive gifts, even taking me out to purchase gifts. I was frightened of him as he showed me often the control techniques he had learned in gaol to incapacitate someone or to get them to do what he wanted. I don't remember sexual experiences with him, but others have pointed out the strange nature of our relationship, even to the point of accusing him of paedophilia. I felt he was the closest thing to a Dad that I had so didn't want to believe it. The Ashram also had a lot of mentally ill people. Some whose genitals would hang out as they sat with their legs open. I don't remember ever being cautioned to avoid anyone or asked if we felt safe with these people around. I frequently witnessed one lady have epileptic fits as she had been given the job to sweep a courtyard that had a black and white pattern on it. I thought it was mean that they knew she was reacting to the pattern and still made her do it. Another mentally ill man they threw down the well. We were encouraged to cheer. I thought it was horrific. I'd been thrown in that well myself. We also grew up exposed to a lot of naked bodies in the communal showers. There was no separating wall between showers-it was all open. Even visitors. I wonder at that even today. Anything could have happened. Adults would give us Munjan- a paste we rubbed on our gums that gave a high. It was a hallucinogenic and illegal but certain swamis had connections, bringing it in from India. The adults used to egg us on to take bigger and bigger hits of it until we were passed out on the floor of the bathroom stalls. No one ever stopped this.

- h. I had to have safe places in the Ashram that I could go when it became too much. I was filled with boiling rage and would scream swear words across the valley trying to free myself of the anger. I also hid in the storeroom, in the middle of a thick clump of bamboo and in a large tree. I used to go to whichever of these places was closest and wait til the crazy feelings went away.
- i. As soon as my mother was able to help me, she did. I used to have to wear a large neck bandage
- j. BREATHE....For years I have had involuntary physical reactions to images of Satyananda. I have a non-distinct memory of my initiation involving more than the transfer of energy and the giving of a new name. The impressions of him being on top of me make me nauseous but for years I have swatted away the thought that he had raped me, as my entire childhood I was raised to believe he was like god. Pure love.
- k. To be honest I was very confused in Gladesville. I didn't fit in, and frequently forgot I was going by my birth name and not my ashram name and wouldn't respond. I watched other kids intensely trying to learn their behaviours and even faked watching TV shows to fit in. I was by this stage an extremely nervous and fearful child. Academically I had always done well but I struggled socially. I was fearful of it being found out that APN and I were not cousins or worse. We were treated like slave at Gladesville ashram, having to earn out keep. I felt that I had seen so many traumatic things by this time I began to write a book. I typed on a typewriter under my doona with a torch under my chin. When Premshakti found what I had written about the ashram and my experiences at Gladesville she destroyed it all and took the typewriter.
- l. I was so distressed by her accusations and anger that I ran out the door and down the street. I didn't know the area and just ran until I couldn't anymore. They later found me in a field and took me home, the whole time trying to figure out what was wrong with me. When I couldn't respond my mother and my husband in Sydney and he said I was traumatised and I needed to come home ASAP. I was put on a bus to the airport and flew home, the whole time not in my right mind. I can honestly say that the trauma of going through such an intense program coupled with not being believed made me snap. I've never fully recovered from this incident and neither has my relationship with my mother and sister.
- m. This has meant we have never been able to have a successful sexual relationship and that has been the source of great pain for both of us. I have always felt there is something wrong with me. Aside from the sexual problems my lack of trust in people and my fear of not being heard have made things difficult in our marriage. Always fighting for what I need, but at the same time not believing I'm worth anything. Shame seemed almost like a third person in our marriage, sometimes with me unable to leave the house due to extreme self-loathing. My husband is not trained as a counsellor but has had to fill that role or fumble along trying to do the right thing, but it has been hard on him having sometimes to care for me as if I am a little girl caught in a state of trauma. Thankfully he's been able to help me but I am hoping out of this I can have proper counselling.
- n. However this process has been very slow. Since my 20s I've had diagnoses of severe depressive disorder, anxiety, ptsd, and prescribed different antidepressants and drugs for ptsd. This along with sleeping pills. I always felt if I could just get to sleep all the other things would go away but my body remained in a hyper vigilant state, unable to relax. Finding someone who can help me has been disheartening as any counsellor I did see would

invariable tell me I needed more specialised help which I could not afford being virtually unemployable by his stage. It was hard to go from having huge expectations put on me both in work and in church life, to people not even knowing if I was turning up. Dreams I've had of starting a business or working in fast paced jobs like marketing, design and creative industries fell away as my health deteriorated. When I heard about a healing retreat with a Christian ministry that was a gentle way to uncover the roots of sickness I jumped at the chance to gain understanding and have some rest. This was the beginning of me understanding how everything connected and I could see the direct correlations to my physical and emotional problems and the things I had suffered, including neglect. I made a decision to start a process of connecting memories and emotions but was warned the road ahead would be very rocky as the numbness I had in order to cope would give way to being able to feel, and that means feeling the pain. I was scared but my life had broken down so much by this point I felt I had nothing to lose. I remained on a path to healing with this ministry even to the point of travelling to the UK once I was in a better frame of mind, even hopeful, to get further understanding. It was there that I received treatment into dissociation and began to reintegrate.

- o. Listening to the statements of the other ashram kids has triggered memories I would like to share regarding the impact of the abuse. Since I was a teenager I have had PCOS and have had internal ultrasounds. Each time I have crumbled into a mess and had to be comforted by the nurses who would wrap me in blankets and rock me. I never understood why it was happening but I do now. I also avoid pap smears.
- p. When I was young we all went to the airport to greet Satyananda. A huge crowd of us, all in orange. I was really excited. However while we were there one of the swamis accidentally dropped her baby off the top of an escalator. It landed in front of me curled in a ball. The sound of the baby hitting the floor haunts me.
- q. Regarding menstruation. I didn't know anything about it. So when it happened to me I thought I was haemorrhaging and screamed and screamed for help. No one came. I lay down on the bathroom floor to die. It sounds funny now, but at the time I was terrified.
- r. When we slept in we were given 100 rounds of surya namaskar by the teacher, and that accrued. Sometimes I could have anything from 100 to 1000 rounds against my name. I was often overwhelmed by this as it was so early.
- s. Impact on my family. I feel as if I haven't known what it's like to be Mothered, Fathered or what it's like to have a sister. The connections are fragile between us all, although I wouldn't hesitate to say that we love each other. We just don't know each other or understand each other. There are so many things about my mum and her decisions I try to understand, and I'm not completely satisfied with her answers. I don't know if I ever will be. It makes me really sad because there was such a beautiful connection between us when I was young. My sister used to beat me in the ashram but also stand up for me, saying no one beats...except me. So our relationship has been characterised by explosions and violence, even after we left the ashram. We found it hard to live together let alone share a room. I could never confide in either her or mum so was often very lonely. All the family I had were separated from me, and replaced with other people who didn't seem to love me at all, with the exception of APL whom I adored. I was more connected with APN than my own sister, but then just when I started to feel like I was getting the hang of it, everything changed again. One minute I had a version of many brothers and sisters, the next minute they were all

gone. For years I longed to reconnect with the other kids who shared a magical but also horrific history with me, but I didn't know where they were. By the time I discovered Facebook I believed it was better for my mental health to be very careful about whom I reconnected with. That is until I was contacted and sent a link to the Easter invitation.

- t. Impact on my parenting. Becoming a parent was the most unexpected, amazing and terrifying thing. I felt I had no internal reservoir to draw from to help me be a good mother. How would I know when I was smothering or neglecting her, or damaging her. I felt I had no role model to follow and I was lost at sea. I read everything. It took a long time to trust that my instincts were right. It was during the first few years of my daughter's life that the effects of the things done to me really hit home. I would hold this tiny girl in my arms and try to understand how anyone could take advantage of someone so small. When she turned 3 I suffered so much because I kept imagining someone abusing her. This would trigger my memories of abuse. She is now 7, the age of a lot of my abuse. Sometimes I find it hard to breathe that a big strong adult could ever touch or hold down a child of 7 and while on one hand it's awful to imagine it happening to her, it has helped me to have some compassion on myself for the things I struggle with.
- u. Impact on reading SAFE people. Because the ashram was full of adults who looked the same to me and roles changed frequently, we kids could be instructed to do something, saying Shishy had said it. Anything that Shishy ordered was done with blind obedience. These meant adults could take advantage of us and did. This led to me not knowing who was safe and who was a predator. Sometimes I would be convinced someone was on my side and then they would switch. Years down the track and I can think of so many occasions where I have misread a person or situation and ended up with further abuse. Like the time I decided to visit my blind neighbour who never had family visit to read to him and he tricked me into going into his room and forcibly held me down, surprisingly strong, the whole time licking my neck and saying I was juicy. I have so many stories like this. Another time was when I visited the ashram as a teenager and a swami from another ashram asked me to show h I'm how to get up to the caves. It never occurred to me I was in danger. But he attempted to rape me.
- v. Things that seemed wrong to me at the time.
 - One of my mum's jobs was to open mail. Any parcels with gifts for swamis were opened and any gifts placed in a basket to go to the back hut for Shishy and Akhandananda. Even birthday cakes sent in tins were put in the basket. As a little kid I felt so sad for the swamis who were often very miserable.
 - There were a few swamis I befriended whom I often found crying in the bathrooms or where they thought they couldn't be seen. Sometimes because it was their birthday and they were lonely, other times because it was Easter and they received nothing. We kids would really score at Easter so I used to love sharing my chocolates.
 - Treatment of vulnerable people
 - Prasad-people lining up to suck Akhandanandas fingers
 - The difference in the living arrangements. Residents got the worst accommodation, visitors the next step up, and Akhandananda and Shishy had an architect designed wooden mansion with marble and slate flooring and spiral staircases, lofts, verandas and overhead pathways. I was fascinated by it. It also had elaborate stain glass windows and expensive furnishings and curtains. I used to love touching everything because it was so beautiful. Persian rugs,

sheepskins, velvet cushions, sumptuous daybeds piled high with cushions and Akhandananda wearing cashmere sweaters while we were freezing.

- Beatings frequently happened out the front of their house.
 - Us little kids grew up watching the abuse happen, specifically of Tim Clark, REDACTE and APO. We understood what was in store for us if we stepped out of line so received fewer beatings
 - When my mum was gone to Darwin I was very alone and I felt I had no protection at all
 - When my uncle RED died my mother wasn't given permission to attend his funeral.
 - When my mum took me to see Akhandananda in gaol she told me he was in there for fraud. Not convicted for sexual assault. She took me to visit a known paedophile in gaol and then to his home.
- w. This year through the ashrams Facebook page (which I began following to stay up to date with healing ceremony information) I found a quote from Satyananda describing his idea of the perfect ashram. I would like to read it and make a comment if I may. "An ashram should be constructed along simple lines by the labour of sanyassins and inmates (he actually says inmates!). it should be situated in an out-of-the-way place where there are many difficulties. At times there should be cyclones, typhoons, floods, extreme heat or cold. Sometimes it should be pleasant and at other times very suffocating. This is my concept of an ashram, and a very beautiful ashram. This is how God has decorated nature." When I read that out to my mother she nodded as if she had known that all along and still made her choice.
- x. My relationship with the ashram. Because my mum maintained contact with the ashram even after leaving and then went back to live a few more times, I have felt I can never truly break free of its effects. At some times the ashram = my mother. Her loyalty was so enmeshed with what was going on with mangrove I felt I couldn't reach her. Sometimes I actually couldn't reach her there and there were many times I felt like I had lost her to the ashram all over again. It became clear over time that mum was once again in conflict with the way things ran there and I witnessed the breaking down of her personality again. On one hand she would beg me not to make her go back and on the other would say she had a duty to fulfil. She was so torn until eventually she broke down when I came to visit and I strongly felt like carrying her to my car and driving away. She was adamant that the next time she left the ashram she was going to do it properly and by herself, which she did in 2007. I feel that this commission will be helpful for my mum as much as it will be difficult, because she needs to see what a critical role she played not just in my own life and story of abuse, but in the lives of the other children. I need to state that while we are definitely on the same side in our disgust with what happened at the ashram, our experiences are very different, and I don't view my mother as a victim of the ashram but her own poor choices. I feel I need to state here, in this safe environment, that my sister and I want to heal from our time at the ashram, but until mum takes responsibility for her decisions she made as an adult in bringing us to the ashram, ignoring the warning signs and ignoring her own misgivings about Shishy and Akhandananda, we cannot believe that she grasps the gravity of it. Describing herself as a victim of Shishy or Akhandananda or blaming Shishy for our childcare is not enough. She alone had the power to remove us from such an unsafe environment, and for her own reasons did not.