

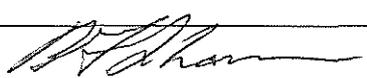
Statement of Brian Thomson (Vivekananda)

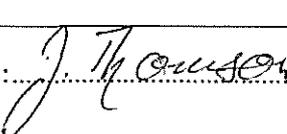
Name Brian Thomson (Vivekananda)
Address Known to the Royal Commission
Occupation Retired Medical Practitioner
Date 21 November, 2014

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. This statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. 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.
2. My full name is Brian Thomson, My spiritual name is Vivekananda. I was born on 24 May, 1934. I have three sons, and four grandchildren.

Background

3. After School I did my compulsory National Service year in around 1952.
4. In 1953 I started my Medical Degree under a Commonwealth scholarship. I completed this in 1959.
5. I went into general medical practice for a while then went onto further study to specialise in Psychiatry.
6. I was married to Mary Thomson (Rishi Hridayananda) in 1961.

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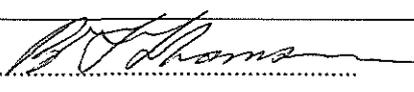
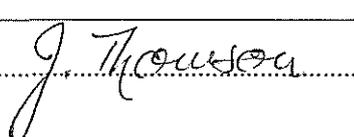
Statement of Brian Thomson (Vivekananda) continued

Initial involvement with Satyananda Yoga and the Mangrove Mountain Yoga Ashram

1. Around 1969 I started practicing Yoga when Swami Satyananda visited Australia and I had met him.
2. My wife Mary Thomson, who was already a competent and respected yoga teacher, and I started a little Ashram in Manly, on Pittwater road. I do not remember the exact address. It was on the second level above a shop. At this time there were around 6 or 7 people who came regularly for Yoga classes. This Ashram had no name, it was just a place for us all to practice yoga.
3. Around 1973, my wife and I and some others bought the land where Mangrove Mountain Ashram is from Bill and Jyoti Brunsdon. We paid between \$19,000.00 and \$20,000.00 for the land. When we bought the property I was the president and my wife was the secretary. My wife and I and some of the people who attended our Ashram used to go up on weekends, swimming in the river and practicing yoga on the property. We used this property in conjunction with our little Ashram in Manly.
4. I went up to an auction in the back of Parramatta around 1974 or 1975 and purchased an ex-army barracks for \$125.00. This was a demountable wood hut with a tin roof, the dimensions of which were 80 feet long 16 feet wide. I arranged for all of the pieces of the building to be brought by truck to the Mangrove property where myself and some of the people from our ashram erected the building. This was the Sadhana hall, it was the first building erected on the site.
5. Around 1974 my wife and I sent our two children, aged 10 and 11 to the Bihar School of Yoga, the Ashram in India, for their school holidays. Later in January I went to India to collect

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Statement of Brian Thomson (Vivekananda) continued

them so that they could return to school in Australia. However when I came to my sons they both informed me they wanted to stay for at least a year. The following year both my sons took the Sannyas. They stayed for about twelve years. My eldest son now lives in Delhi, India and works for EKO, a mobile phone banking service in India. My second child who visited the Ashram is now a builder.

6. Around 1974 or 1975, my wife and I picked up Swami Akhandananda Saraswati (Akhandananda) from the airport and took him home to our residence in Newport. For around a year Swami Akhandananda Saraswati lived with us.
7. Around late 1975 or 1976 Akhandananda moved out and lived somewhere in Bondi. My wife and I were still living in Newport at this time, however later that year we sold our house and moved to Avalon, a suburb of Sydney. At no time from when we met Akhandananda till we went to India to stay was there any hint of the sort of behaviour in which he indulged later.
8. Akhandananda, myself, my wife and our friends from our Ashram organised an International Yoga Convention at the Hordern Pavilion in 1976. Swami Satyananda came over from India to run programs at the convention.
9. The convention was a huge success, and over two thousand people attended. After the convention we understood that there was an interest in Sydney in the subject of yoga. We saw that there was a real need to unite these people and expand the Ashram at Mangrove Mountain.
10. Straight after the convention in 1976 my wife went over to India with our youngest son when he was six years of age, and they were to stay for approximately 10 years to live in different

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J. Thomson

Statement of Brian Thomson (Vivekananda) continued

Ashrams. I know she ran a large Ashram in Calcutta for the large part of this period of time.

During her time in India she had no involvement at the Ashram in Mangrove Mountain.

11. I kept on working as a psychiatrist, in private practice in Manly. I lived in our house in Avalon.

However in 1977, I also went to live in India.

12. Around 1986, due to changes in immigration laws my family no longer had the required visas to stay in India, and so returned to Australia. I returned from USA. We lived at Collaroy on the Northern Beaches for about a year. We all returned to various jobs, owing to the fact that we had not been receiving an income for the past ten years. Then my wife and I moved up to Diamond Beach on the NSW Mid-north Coast into a house we had built, and stayed there for a further eight years. During that time we had no contact with the centre at Mangrove Mountain.

13. Around the time of our return my wife and I had had one contact with people connected to the Mangrove Yoga Ashram but we were not directly involved with the Ashram.

14. In 1993, my wife and I met with Swami Satyananda in India. He indicated his wish that we return to the Mangrove Ashram in order to "give it a shape" by maintaining the physical and spiritual essence of the Ashram. I again became a director of the Ashram around 1994, and around January 1996 my wife and I returned to the Ashram to live and took up those duties. My wife became the Acharya, a spiritual leader.

15. My wife and I have both lived there ever since in a residence at the top of the mountain, above, about 7 km from where the Ashram is located in the valley.

Involvement with the Criminal Proceedings of Swami Akhandananda Saraswati

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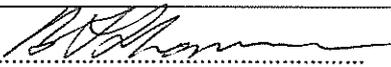
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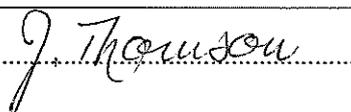
Statement of Brian Thomson (Vivekananda) continued

16. When I returned to the Ashram in November 1994, I was unaware of the allegations against Swami Akhandananda Saraswati. It was not until quite some time later that I found out about what had happened. I cannot recall any conversation with anyone regarding Akhandananda at the time of my return.
17. In 1996, my wife had received a telephone call from Akhandananda, where he said to her, "I am coming back to the Ashram", but he never did.
18. Around this time, I did come to know from people at Mangrove Ashram that Akhandananda had been in gaol. I do not remember exactly who told me this information, and was not aware of the specific findings that were made against him in the proceedings.

Formation of the Working Together Taskforce

19. I was informed of the formation of the Working Together Taskforce by Swami Yogasandhan, however I have not been directly involved in it.
20. I knew Mr Bert Frenzen because he had been to the Mangrove Ashram on previous occasions and provided his assistance and professional expertise in human resources. He began to help the ashram make organisational improvements, and provided advice on how to deal with the Royal Commission.
21. I know that Mr Bert Frenzen took a leading role in the creation of the taskforce. He was instrumental in helping the ashram develop their response to the issues that had arisen in relation to child sexual abuse. He helped develop appropriate procedures and policies to deal with what had happened. The Taskforce did not have the necessary expertise and required his professional advice and help.

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Witness: 

Statement of Brian Thomson (Vivekananda) continued

22. I had no direct contact with Mr Frenzen regarding the matters on how to handle the issues that had arisen as this went through the Working Together Task Force.

Facebook and Emails Regarding Victims, Bhakti Manning or Mary Smith

23. I did see some of the early Facebook materials, but did not look in to them further. They were distressing to see.

24. I never gave direct recommendations on how to deal with the emails from Bhakti Manning. I believe the Taskforce sought the professional advice from Mr Frenzen.

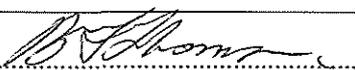
25. I have never had any contact with any of the survivors. I was not present at the time of their abuse.

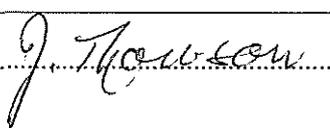
The 40th Anniversary celebrations

26. The celebration was designed to help those people involved in the Ashram in the early years. It gave everybody an opportunity to be recognised and allowed anyone involved with the Ashram the opportunity to raise their grievances.

27. For the event, the ashram invited anyone who had ever been a part of the Ashram to spend the weekend at the Ashram. My wife had the role of inviting people involved with the Ashram through both the Mangrove webpage and Facebook.

28. It was around this time that Yogasandhan arranged for Mr Terry O'Connell to come to the Ashram. He assisted the Ashram by providing assistance about the child abuse issues. I did not speak to him directly. I believe his role was to manage the difficulties that people had

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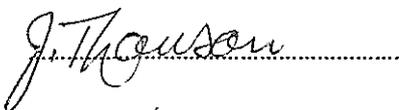
Statement in the matter of the Yoga Ashram

Statement of Brian Thomson (Vivekananda) continued

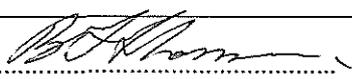
faced by running a number of sessions where people had the opportunity to raise any grievances they had. I did see his main presentation at the celebration.

Signed: 

Date: 24/11/2014

Witness: 

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