



Royal Commission  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

**Statement**

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**Name** Adrian Steer  
**Address** Known to the Royal Commission  
**Occupation**  
**Date** 11 February 2015

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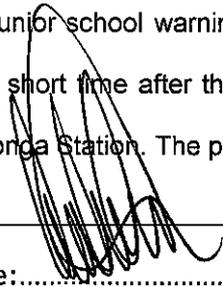
1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. My full name is Adrian Steer. I was born in 1969 in Sydney and I am 45 years old.

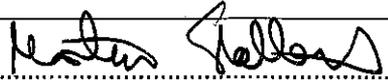
**Knox Grammar School**

3. I first attended Knox in 1980, I began in the Prep School in grade 5.

**Sexual abuse at Knox Grammar School**

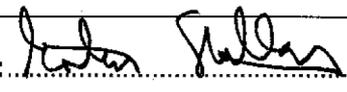
4. When I was in grade 5 or 6 at Knox I played soccer during the winter. Training would take place after school and by the time that it was finished it was usually dark. My mother would normally pick me up after training but for whatever reason that didn't eventuate and I had to catch the train home.
5. I was sexually assaulted by a man during the train trip home from school. I don't remember whether I told my parents or anyone at the school about what happened to me, but I can still remember the incident as clear as day in my own head.
6. I remember a few weeks later the vice-principal at the school made an announcement to the whole junior school warning us not to hang around in the toilets at the station because it wasn't safe. A short time after that I saw the man who assaulted me being arrested on the platform at Wahroonga Station. The police had him in handcuffs.

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7. I didn't go to the police about what the man had done to me. I blamed myself and thought I had done something wrong. I believe that this incident had an effect on me because I hated going to school from around this point onwards.
8. In 1985, while I was in year 10, I started boarding at Knox. Even though I lived close by to the school it was thought that living on campus would be better for my studies and academic performance.
9. The Resident Master in my boarding house in 1985 was a man named Damien Vance. I think he had been teaching at Sydney Grammar School before he came to Knox. I would regularly sneak out of the boarding house at night with a few friends to smoke cigarettes. Vance was a smoker too and soon detected us. Instead of reprimanding us, Vance encouraged us, he would let us smoke in the store room used by the cadets which was known as the "Q Store" and he would frequently go down there and smoke with us.
10. On one occasion down in the "Q Store" with Vance and three other class mates we were chatting and Vance said to us words to the effect that:  came into my room because he had a headache, I noticed that he had a hard on, so I sucked him off." Vance seemed pretty light-hearted and pleased with himself as he told us this.
11. Another time I went into Vance's room for some reason and he showed me a plastic ruler which had markings on it. Vance told me that another student and he had used the ruler to measure their erect penises.
12. Thankfully these were the only occasions that Vance discussed such things with me and he didn't ever try and touch me. However, due to my past experiences I was on high alert and wary of him.
13. The next year I went to a different boarding house where Adrian Nisbett was the Resident Master. This was on the prep school campus but was a house for Year 11 and 12 students.
14. Nisbett had a dark room for photography connected to his room in the boarding house. It was a tiny room which was only really big enough for two people to stand in.

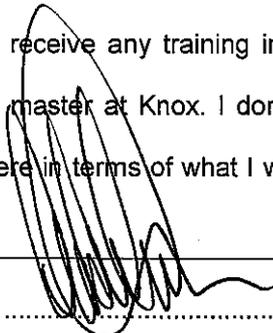
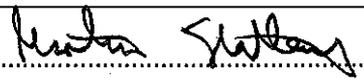
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15. One day Nisbett asked me to come into the dark room so that he could show me how to focus a photograph using the equipment he had. I followed Nisbett into the room and he began to explain and demonstrate the equipment to me, which included him twisting a knob which was positioned low on the front of the machine.
16. As Nisbett twisted the knob his elbow came into contact with my groin area and rubbed up and down in a circular movement.
17. At first I thought this was an accident so I adjusted myself slightly, as well as I could in the confined space, but before long his elbow was rubbing my groin again. I was uncomfortable and scared and got out of there as soon as I could.
18. After that incident I would lie awake at night in the boarding school, fearful that Nisbett would come and get me while I was asleep.
19. I was kicked out of the boarding house during year 11 for continually disobeying rules. I finished my higher school certificate at Knox as a day boy.

**Life after Knox**

20. After school I worked in a number of varied roles and travelled. In 1991 I started a Bachelor of Education.
21. In 1994 I took on a role as a boarding master at Knox. I was responsible for the overall running of the house. This included duties such as waking the boys in the morning, making sure they got off to breakfast on time and then to school on time. After-school supervision was also part of the job as coordinating night time study, supper and then ensuring the boarders were in bed by the required time. I was not paid for any of this work but was provided free board.
22. I did not receive any training in child protection type issues before I was given the role as the boarding master at Knox. I don't remember any training of any type really, I was told what my duties were in terms of what I was expected to do supervising and preparing the students before

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and after school. Other than that I don't remember any real supervision or direction being given by the management at the school.

23. I remember Dr Patterson was still the school principal at the time but I had very little interaction with him while I was working in the boarding house. I only remember speaking with him on one occasion during that year.
24. I have a vague recollection of Nisbett being at the school in 1994 but I don't remember having anything at all to do with him, although I do recall being apprehensive at the thought of running into him.
25. In 1995 I took on a different job and I don't think I returned to Knox until after the arrests of Vance and Nisbett.
26. About ten years later, in or about April 2004 I was contacted by a man named Grahame Wilson who was a private investigator from the company Lee, Kelly & Associates. He informed me he had been retained by Knox Grammar School to investigate a matter involving alleged sexual abuse.
27. He asked if he could interview me and I agreed to this interview. He came to my work place on or about 29 April 2004. He asked me questions about Adrian Nisbett and during the interview, due to the nature of information I volunteered about Adrian Nisbett, I also provided certain information about Damian Vance which I thought poignant to the investigation. I did not have any further contact with Mr Wilson after that interview, other than being sent a copy of the transcript.
28. I was quite upset that I had been contacted by a stranger out of the blue who wanted to ask me about very personal information.
29. During the interview Mr Wilson asked me if I had ever disclosed my experiences to a man who worked at Knox by the name of Stuart Pearson. Apparently Mr Pearson had told the investigator that I had disclosed my experiences with Nisbett to him at some stage.
30. I may have told Mr Pearson this information. I remember Mr Pearson well and with fondness. He was the disciplinarian at the school called the General Duties Master. Given my track record at the school I did deal with him quite often and to this day I am impressed with the way he conducted himself, he had an innate ability to know when I was misbehaving whether I needed a caning or a more pastoral approach. I have a lot of respect for him.

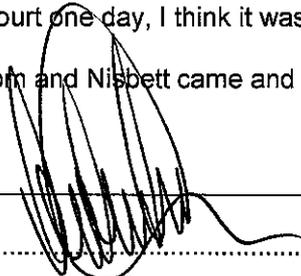
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Witness: *Robert Steer*.....

31. I told the investigator that I don't ever remember making such a disclosure to Mr Pearson. I can't specifically recall telling him anything, but that isn't to say that I didn't. In fact, given my respect for him and the pastoral nature of our relationship at the school, I think that if I were to have told anyone about Nisbett, it would have been Pearson.
32. I thought nothing more of the interview for many years.
33. In 2009 I was working as the CEO of Yachting NSW. One evening my mother phoned me and said that Knox was in the news because two teachers, Treloar and Stewart, had been arrested.
34. I began researching the news of these arrests on the internet and saw that the police had established a taskforce. This prompted me to contact the police to tell them what had happened to me.
35. I made two statements to police in February 2009 and shortly afterwards both Nisbett and Vance were arrested.
36. During the course of providing a statement to the Police I recalled another incident of abuse which was unrelated to Knox. I was and am still amazed at how I had been able to suppress such an incident for so long and then all of a sudden it would come back to me.

#### **Criminal Proceedings**

37. I found my involvement in the criminal proceedings to be very traumatic. It was the beginning of an emotional downward spiral in my life. I stopped eating properly; I couldn't focus at work; I would say I was working at home but just stared at the screen and did nothing; I couldn't sleep properly - instead I would lay awake and ruminate, about Nisbett in particular.
38. I found all the press surrounding the police charges very difficult. Although I wasn't named specifically I saw the media referring to incidents which I had told to the police and knew it was me they were talking about.
39. I was emotionally coping very poorly. Eventually my employer decided to make my role as CEO redundant. I knew I was really being fired for the way my performance had declined.
40. One part in particular about the criminal proceedings which still troubles me today is that when I was in Court one day, I think it was a mention, I'm not sure about the legal term, I was sitting in the Court room and Nisbett came and sat directly next to me.

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41. I was freaking out, I couldn't understand how an offender would be allowed such close access to a victim in the Courts. Even though I was a grown man by this time, I thought the whole thing was terribly organised. To this day I still think: what if people more vulnerable than me were put in the same predicament?
42. I have no faith in the legal process after my involvement in the criminal process. It wasn't just the fact that Nisbett had the ability to come and sit next to me. It was the fact that he drew the whole process out over about a year and then pleaded guilty just before the trial. I thought he could have spared me and the other victims the trauma of thinking about it for almost a year.
43. I also remember being at the sentencing and the judge making comments which were praising Nisbett for attempting to get on with his life. I don't really understand the whole legal process but this seemed very strange and insulting to me.

#### **Civil Litigation**

44. Due to my involvement in the criminal proceedings I was referred by a friend to Carroll and O'Dea to investigate the possibility of a civil claim.
45. After having gone through the process I would say that if anyone came to me in a similar situation I would advise them to bury their thoughts and get on with their life.
46. I was happy with my own legal representation, they did a good job for me, but I was just unimpressed by the confrontational nature of Gadens Lawyers who tried to poke holes in everything I said.
47. I eventually settled my claim out of court at an informal settlement conference held at Gadens. This process left a very bitter taste in my mouth. I had asked for and expected a representative from Knox to be present. I was hoping that the process would include an opportunity for me to speak to John Weeks and get some of my feelings off my chest. I don't know why, but no one from school was there and there was no follow up afterwards for me.

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48. The claim settled for \$270,000 inclusive of costs and disbursements. After Medicare, Centrelink and legal costs deductions I received about \$125,000 clear to me. To me it wasn't about the money though, I expected Knox to reach out and at least apologise to me, to this day I still haven't had that.
49. I remember at the time that I settled speaking to my lawyers about my real concern that what I had experienced through the criminal and civil process, which meant that I was unemployed for about two years, would have a lasting impact on my long term career and that I may never get another job in my chosen industry. No amount of money would fix a two year gap in my resume which I would need to constantly explain. I still battle with that idea today.
50. In hindsight I wish I hadn't settled and had taken the matter to Court. I have thought about this a lot over the past few weeks and feel that Knox's lawyers were constantly obstructing and arguing with my lawyers, it feels to me that they were trying to drag the process out for as long as possible so that eventually I would just give up, which I now feel that I did. To add insult to that feeling I also feel that Knox failed to use the settlement process as an opportunity to try and make things right on a personal level.
51. Given the fact that I had been so clearly failed me as a student at Knox, for them to engage in such an adversarial way through their lawyers made me feel like I was being screwed all over again.

**Ombudsman**

52. After I contacted the police I also began to think about the interview I had conducted with the private investigator in 2004. I had given the investigator the same information which I had given to the police. It seemed to me that the information in the hands of the investigator had amounted to nothing whereas the police had taken that same information and arrested Vance and Nisbett almost straight away.

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Witness: *Nathan Sattar*.....

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53. I contacted the Ombudsman to make inquiries about the investigation process I had participated in in 2004. Annexed hereto and marked 'A' is a true copy of my letter to the Ombudsman.
54. My recollection of the response I received from the Ombudsman was that they were avoidant and unhelpful. I certainly didn't receive a satisfactory answer to any of the questions I had raised.
55. As I was disappointed by the Ombudsman's response I went to my local MP, Gladys Berejiklian, to see what could be done. When I met her she was quite sympathetic and enthusiastic about trying to solve the problem. She seemed confident that she would be able to do something for me.
56. I received a response some time later from Ms Berejiklian to the effect that she couldn't do anything about it. I was very disappointed by this given the impression she had given me when we met. It seemed as though I was being fobbed off, I didn't get the impression that she had done much investigation for me at all.

**Impact of child sexual abuse**

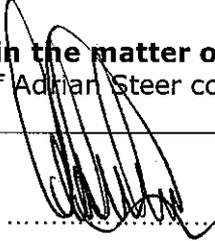
57. What I experienced at Knox has impacted me in a huge way. It will for the rest of my life.
58. Some days I struggle to get out of the house. I hate going out and being around crowds, I can never relax.
59. I do not go to Church. The last time I went was to watch my mother sing in a choir and I had to run out of there as soon as I could. This process with Knox has ruined any lingering thoughts I had about the existence of God.
60. I still worry about recalling memories of traumatic events which may have been suppressed. I still can't remember all the details of what happened to me at Knox, but they what I can remember has troubled me greatly.

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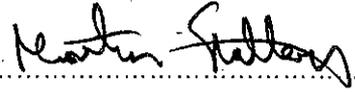
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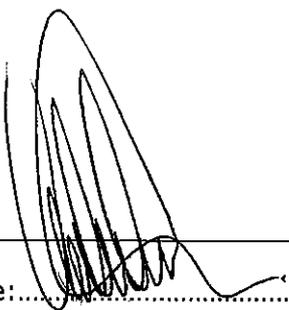
**Statement in the matter of Knox Grammar School**  
Statement of Adrian Steer continued

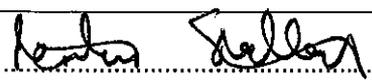
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