

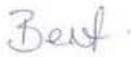
From: [Bert Franzen](#)
To: ["Working Together"](#); ["Ahimsadhara Saraswati"](#); ["Atma"](#); ["Poornamurti"](#); ["Sarah Tetlow"](#); ["Suryamitra"](#); ["Swami Haribodhananda"](#)
Subject: Comment on Alecia Buchanan correspondence
Date: Wednesday, 2 April 2014 1:14:00 PM
Attachments: [image013.png](#)
[image014.png](#)
[image015.png](#)

Hello Everyone

I've just read Alecia's letter. We can't fix what is broken. We can only acknowledge the damage done. Alecia, in a very articulate way, has made it clear that the only solution she wants is "reparation and restitution".

It is my view that that is just not possible, is not on the table, technically not our responsibility and we should move on. Ultimately she's had her day in court and won...if she doesn't want to accept our apology or the efforts we're making then so be it.

Kind regards



Bert Franzen

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From: Working Together [mailto:workingtogethertf@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, 1 April 2014 4:59 PM
To: Ahimsadhara Saraswati; Atma; Bert Franzen; Poornamurti; Sarah Tetlow; Suryamitra; Swami Haribodhananda
Subject: Alecia Buchanan correspondence

Hari Om,

here are the emails received from Alecia today in response to one I sent her in the hope of encouraging a reply before I go to MM. It's good that she has written. She's right about MM needing to know who they are apologising to. Suryamitra, can you please find all records relating to the abused and how to contact them, including court or police records. And please remind the residents of Mangrove that rumours start very easily and they need to avoid getting into discussions about things they don't have real information on.

12:45 PM (2 hours ago)

I am going to send a brief reply to Alecia acknowledging her emails and then we can work out a fuller response. 



The following thread includes the email I sent to her a couple of days ago.

Om, Ahimsa

ABuchanan

to me



- Good morning Ahimsadhara. I received your message re contacting you before this coming Thursday, just as I had found some time to sit down and write my response to your letter informing me about the taskforce. As things are moving so quickly, I feel the need to send you this email now. This will be followed by my more comprehensive response (perhaps later today) to your letter dated 26th March. I have 2 children, one just starting preschool, and am holding down 2 jobs, therefore my own free time is hard to come by.

This message is for you in particular Ahimsadhara, although I am fully aware you are part of a team and as such will need to share. That is fine. My feeling is that you are a kind and decent person, as are many people involved in Satyananda Yoga. And you have been around the ashram for a while. And you are a mother. You sound as though you want what is best for all.

This morning I was sent another story, this one about a mother, another person not yet mentioned, who ended her life after, as a young woman in her 20's, donating her considerable life savings to the ashram under Akhandananda's influence, after which she was 'kicked out'. At some stage in the 90's she approached the ashram for some recognition of this, perhaps some assistance I don't know, and was given the clear message it was between her and Akh, and Satyananda Ashram could do nothing.

How can you possibly, possibly believe that this sorry day, which should have been 20 years in the making, not 4 weeks, carry any meaning, for her family, for me, for others you don't even know exist yet? Does anyone at Mangrove or in the Satyananda Yoga family even know who the hurt people are? What are their names? Has anyone yet done the research, looked up the police records of all the people who gave statements, checked to court transcripts to read for themselves what really happened? My guess is no.

I know only some people, but there are more. I'd never heard of this previous devotee, or her family, before this morning. Victims and their families are starting to make contact with me, some ready to talk, some not yet, except to say their experience with Satyananda Ashram has had a devastating and lasting impact on their lives. Who will come forward next? And what is Satyananda Ashram going to offer them? How on earth will they be able to find a way to seek restitution with the ashram if the organization is still so closed? Surely they don't need to resort to grappling around in the dark until by chance they find someone like me who also survived those days.

And please stop looking at this with the 'one or two rotten apples' view. There is a deep and hurtful culture that needs examining. There are others who hurt loving devotees deeply and lastingly. How do I tell you 'it goes right to the top' without sounding like a cliché BBC drama, or without shattering the illusions of so many? But that's where it stands. I have no reason to doubt those who have given me their stories, just as they have trusted me to tell the truth of my sexual, physical and emotional abuse to them.

I have no idea who is on this taskforce but right now I don't need to know. I suspect it involves some people who were 'there' at the time and thus were one of the many who stayed silent while we sat in police stations, made our statements, went to committal hearings, appeared as witnesses in trials. This went on for years and years. Please pass them this message:

The planned Apology day is yours; it belongs to the Satyananda Ashram and its affiliated organisations. It cannot be mine. I have not been engaged, except in this very rushed way at this very last minute. I have heard talk of this day being about reconciliation. I do not want reconciliation. I have not been asked what I want, but if you were to ask me now it would begin with reparation and restitution. And not just for me. For so many who have loved so much and lost so much, and have been betrayed and shunned. Find out who they are, and ask them what they have been through, and what they need. For the years that it takes you.

ABuchanan

12:47 PM (2 hours ago)

to me



I needed to seek permission to forward this message I received today to your task force. It is the one I mention in my previous email. Alecia

I write as a person who suffered the shocking horror of being sexually abused within this institution – abuse that started shortly after my fifteenth birthday. But I will not be talking about me. I wish to pay tribute to another victim of abuse within this institution – abuse of a different kind.

REDACTED

was a young hard working nurse in her twenties when she became involved in this

ashram. She, like many others, was pushed to show her true devotion to the concept of sannyasa, by giving all her savings to the ashram. At the time she had saved around \$40,000, sufficient in the 1970's to buy a house in the Manly-Balgowlah area. She was taken to Gosford by Swami Akhandananda so she could sign over her savings. Not long after that, she was told to she had to leave the ashram. She was thrown out.

When Swami Niranjan visited in 1994 and 1995, ex-swamis were invited to attend the programs. [REDACTED] was one who attended. She had since married and had two young girls, though her marriage had broken up. A single mother, with two little girls – she approached the ashram asking for consideration of her situation and the fraud that had been played upon her by the ex-head of the Ashram. She was told it was between her and Swami Akhandananda – nothing to do with the Ashram.

Approximately 15 years later, when her girls were in their late teens, [REDACTED] ended her own life. We had kept contact for many years, but after the death of her mother, [REDACTED] inherited sufficient money to buy a house in a country town. Gradually we kept less contact. Our friendship had always been overshadowed by the Ashram issues and the sadness that hung around these issues. I assumed the reduced contact was due to [REDACTED] moving on, rebuilding, and wanting to leave those issues behind. So I did not push for more contact. I was wrong. The pain never left her. Rather than moving on to a better life, she was withdrawing. I wish I had known.

Recently I came across a letter she had written to me in August 1995. I have transcribed it here, leaving out my name and names of the children mentioned.

Dear Friend

Thank you for the letter! I didn't burn the photos, I burnt the books.

I liked your letter. I must say I did feel a bit exposed! Maybe it is the only way to go.

Of course, like most who have been involved, it never leaves me. Yet I do not feel there has been enough care or direction. Chant "Om".

Well I suppose we have a few decades to see if there is any truth in all this! And maybe for our children there is hope.

We are settling into this area okay. My girls like the school and riding their bikes. How is your boy?

Love [REDACTED] and her girls.

"I suppose we have a few decades to see if there is any truth in all this. And maybe for our children there is hope"

[REDACTED] did not make it through two decades. She was a soft hearted lovely lady who could never comprehend how people could be treated so poorly. Obviously, it never left her. And I wonder now about the lives of her two girls, what they must be like, how they must have suffered, and I hope they don't blame themselves. And I hope there is hope in their lives – but I do not know.

From: Working Together [mailto:workingtogethertf@gmail.com]

Sent: Sunday, 30 March 2014 7:33 PM

To: Alecia Buchanan

Subject: Apology Day

Dear Alecia,

We are now working out the details of the Apology Day. I'll be travelling to Mangrove later this week to help with the planning. I really want to represent you and your group in whatever way I can. Please remember that I am not part of Mangrove Ashram. I am a Satyananda Yoga teacher, but I am completely independent and have no obligation to be on the Working Together Task Force. I volunteered and am there

because I believe in the work that needs to be done.

I have two requests: can I talk with you before I travel (I fly on Thursday morning)? I can call you whenever it suits. My time is flexible right now. If you want to talk, please let me know when and on what number. If we can't talk, perhaps we can have an email conversation?

Secondly, will you or any of the group come for Easter Sunday? As I mentioned in the letter, I will request that Mangrove fund travel.

If you are not able to come, or don't feel comfortable to come, we will be videoing the ceremony and talks and will send you and others a copy if we have addresses. We want people to know about this. The video will be put online. There are over 100 booked for the Easter weekend so far.

I know that the past can't be changed, but it's up to us to make the future what we want it to be. That applies to each of us as individuals and to organisations like Satyananda Yoga. Satyananda Yoga has a big reach. It can be a powerful voice for change and for supporting the whole process that is going on with the Royal Commission. The RC want to see cultural change, as that is what is required to stop abuse in institutions. The culture at Mangrove *has* changed and the way you have spoken out has helped push that change along, making it stronger and clearer. We thank you for that.

I have just gone through all the FB posts again and they have been useful in giving me some ideas of what is needed. In reading the FB posts there were quotes I would like to have read out. There are very important sentiments expressed there and also some very beautiful memories amongst the hardship. You and your friends express yourselves well and give powerful messages which will inspire others. I have noted the mention of the two who committed suicide and will have their memory included.

Others who are not in the group you represent have also been in touch with us and many teachers are writing in to support this process for healing and reconciliation.

Kind regards,
Ahimsa