ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Public Hearing - Case Study 28
(Day C78)

Ballarat Magistrates' Court,
100 Grenville Street, South Ballarat
Victoria

On Wednesday, 20 May at 10.00am

Before
The Presiding Member: Justice Peter McClellan AM
Commissioner: Justice Jennifer Ann Coate
Mr Andrew Murray

Counsel Assisting: Ms Gail Furness SC
THE CHAIR: Yes, Ms Furness.

MS FURNESS: Thank you. Your Honour, I call Gordon Hill.

<GORDON LYALL HILL, affirmed: [10.03am]

<EXAMINATION BY MS FURNESS:

MS FURNESS: Q. Are you alright, Mr Hill?
A. It's an uncomfortable chair.

Q. Would you tell the Royal Commission your full name?
A. I don't usually go by my first name because it's always classed as "Hilly", but it's Gordon Lyall Hill.

Q. You've made a statement for the Royal Commission dated 7 May, Mr Hill?
A. I did.

Q. The contents of that are true and correct?
A. Yes, they are, definitely.

Q. You have a copy of that in front of you. Would you like us to staple that for you?

EXHIBIT #28-10 STATEMENT OF GORDON LYALL HILL DATED 07/05/2015

Q. I invite you to read your statement, Mr Hill. I'm happy to take over if you want me to at any time.
A. I haven't come over 3,000 kilometres not to be able to read this.

Q. Good.
A. "My name is Gordon Lyall Hill and I'm known to the Royal Commission. 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."

Where direct - do I have to read the whole lot?

Q. No, you don't have to read that paragraph, Mr Hill.
A. "Life at St Joseph's Orphanage, Ballarat. That was out at Sebastopol.
When I was about five months old, I was brought into a
holding home located in a little town, Gordon, just out of
here, a small town west of Melbourne, Victoria. I left the
holding home in 1946 when I was around 3 years old. I
remember taking a little bus with other kids out of the
home in Gordon. About five other kids were picked up along
the way and we all travelled from Gordon to Ballarat. I
have vivid memories of seeing these little kids getting
into the bus.

I was placed in St Joseph's Home, Ballarat, St Joey's
as I call it. St Joey's was located in Sebastopol, west of
Ballarat and was run by the Sisters of Nazareth. St Joey's
was a self-contained orphanage and had its own farm, chook
house, gardens, and it supplied vegetables and milk to
other institutions as well.

There are three categories of kids in St Joey's.
There were kids who came to St Joey's during the day for
school, then there was other ones that still had outside
links with a relative, usually an aunt or an uncle who used
to come and see them every third Sunday of the month.
Lastly, there were the kids that didn't have anybody
outside at all that they could go out with.

I was part of the last category with about 25 other
kids. We were, as I always used to call them, the drones
of St Joey's. We didn't go to school and we did all the
work around the orphanage. Most of us didn't even know our
full names and we were just given a number.

My name was 29, because that was my locker number. I
didn't learn of my surname until I was 10 or 11 years old,
that's when I started working in the kitchen.
Sister Reginald, who was in charge of the kitchen, said to
me, 'Not another Hill'. I didn't know what that meant
until I found out later from other kids.

The building at St Joey's had several wings and the
children moved around to different parts of the building as
they grew older. Boys and girls aged up to 5 years old
were placed in the nursery. After they turned 5, the girls
moved into Nazareth House, that's out at Wendouree, while
the boys stayed at St Joey's and lived in the other part of
the building.

Most of the nuns at St Joey's were cruel and harsh,
with the exception of some. I remember, there was two nuns that used to look after about 25 babies in the nursery wing that was built in the 1950s who were strict but fair.

For about nine months, when I was around 9 years old, I used to help out in the nursery from the Friday until Sunday. I loved working over there. When I went over there, the kids would be screaming, little babies, but I would soon have them sitting around in a circle humming and clapping. These nine months were the happiest time at St Joey's but, after that, it all went to shit. Excuse my expression.

In those days, we were not allowed to know the names of the nuns or touch the nuns. We weren't allowed to look at the priests faces at all. To touch a nun was considered the worst disrespect. One time, I helped one of the elderly nuns who had fallen over on some steps near the door going over to the chapel and she hurt herself. This was one of the kinder nuns who used to give me jelly beans. Two of the other nuns came out of the chapel - because they had their own chapel over there - as I was lifting her to help her to sit up. I got the thrashing of my life, and I've got scars to prove it.

There was no such thing as privacy in St Joey's. The bathrooms had communal showers along the wall as well as toilets, sunken baths and a set of basins. There was also an extension fire hose next to the doorway. If we got caught in the bathroom doing something that the nuns thought we weren't supposed to be doing, on would go the fire hose and you'd get squirted and the force of the fire hose would throw you against the wall.

The children at St Joey's only had two sets of clothes. We had a Sunday best outfit to go to church in, plus shoes, and then we had other working clothes which were bib overalls, an old shirt and old coat and sandals. Now, the sandals used to be like the monks used to wear, old leather sandals, open toes.

The sandals got worn out very quickly and we only got two pairs a year. For five years plus I had a pair of shoes with two right feet because the left had been pinched by one of the other kids and I only wore them when I had to. I still have trouble with my feet today because the toes get squashed up.
Labour and schooling at St Joey's:

There was only a few paid staff at St Joey's. The drones, like me, had to do all the labour-intensive work. We had to clean all the classrooms, dormitories, dining rooms, we set the tables for breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea and dinner. We served the meals, then we washed the dishes. In between that, we cleaned the floors, staircases, did the washing, did some more cleaning; had to do other things, like in the gardens. Sometimes we were sent to clean the church at St Joey's, because they had their own church.

There was no schooling for the drones whatsoever. The only time I went into a classroom was to clean the blackboards and pick up the papers off the floor while the other kids went out to have morning tea.

I did not learn how to read and write until I got out of that home many years later, when I went onto a farm and taught myself how to read and write. I still can't write fluently and have trouble with spelling. A lot of people do.

Sexual abuse and the horror room:

We had a parish priest who used to come to St Joey's. It was common for the priests to stay overnight on a Friday and Saturday nights and take confession on a Saturday evening and give mass on Sunday morning. The priests used to sleep in one of the two rooms located downstairs alongside the outside door leading over to St Joey's Church. One of these rooms was a bathroom with a little alcove and a little day bed under the stairs. Then the other room was a bigger room; I called these rooms the horror rooms because these rooms was where I was abused in.

I was first abused by a priest at St Joey's when I was around 5 years old. One day, I was cleaning the tile staircase when one of the nuns grabbed me by the ears and said, 'Father wants to cleanse you, 29'. Horrible. I don't remember the name of this nun.

I was thrown into one of the horror rooms where I was made to strip off and get into an old fashioned small bath. A priest gave me a drink, I didn't know his name, but I
remember that he looked as though he was in his 40s. After
I finished the drink, I just bloody well blacked out. I
don't know whether there was drugs in the drink, but I have
no memory of what happened after that.

When I came to, I hurt like bloody hell. I was
bleeding from the top of my back, down to my shins. My
genitals and my bottom were the worst, they hurt like they
were on fire. I later discovered I had bite marks on my
privates. I don't know how long I was out for. When I
woke up, the priest told me to get out and pushed me out
doors, where the nun, who had told me to go to the
priest, was waiting outside. She was laughing - big joke
to her - and told me to get back to work, maybe because I
was walking funny and my bum hurt so much.

Then it gets worse. The confessional box:

When I was a bit older, before I went to work at the
nursery, I was chosen to be an altar boy at the church at
St Joey's. I was about 9 or 10. I met a different priest
called Father - 'shithead' I'll call him. I would go to
the church used before the start of Sunday night's
confession - you don't mind me saying this word?

Q. Just say Father, Mr Hill.
A. I'll just say "the priest". "The priest used to strip
me down in the vestry, touch me and dress me in the altar
boy outfit, which was a pink smock. He would then make me
sit on the floor beneath the padded bench in the
confessional box. I used to enter the confessional box
before the parishioners came in for Saturday night
confession. The priest then used to come in and sit on the
padded bench. He would pull me by my hair, rub me, and I
had to play with his genitals while he listened to
confession.

If I made a noise as I was sitting beneath the
priest's bench in the confessional box, he would whack me
across the face to shut me up. If any Catholics had known
what was going on, they would have been horrified.

One of the things I noticed during the confession was
that the women got off lightly when getting absolution from
the priest. The guys sometimes had to pay out money in
order to get absolution. The priest told the men how much
he wanted from them. He asked some of the guys for up to
5 pounds, in those days it was a lot of money. I used to hear the person confessing slip through a piece of crinkly paper beneath the meshing that separated the priest and the public in the confessional box. The priest took the money and put it in his pocket; I could hear it crinkling.

The sexual abuse I suffered when I was 5 years old went on for at least about seven years. I was abused by three priests altogether, but I only remember - this actually particular priest’s name.

When I was around 11 or 12 years old I was put in the farm boys' dormitory. After this, the sexual abuse got worse. It started off as sexual abuse, but as I got older it went on to the physical and dungeon type of thing. The horror rooms, they had medieval paintings, a big wooden X cross on one wall. I used to be stripped down and tied up and sexually abused by it.

During my time at St Joey's, priests normally stayed for about six months - I never knew why, but I found out later - and then they were replaced by a new one. I couldn't understand why there was no permanent priest there.

Physical punishment:

The physical punishment at St Joey's was harsh. Sometimes the nuns would punish us by pulling a tooth out with a pair of pliers or whacking us across the face with an engineer's hammer, which broke a lot of our teeth. I've even got scars to prove that. This happened to me a few times. On one occasion I was hit across the mouth for eating carrots from the garden I was weeding in with a lump of wood, and I still have the scars on my face. (Indicates).

Later on in life I went to a dentist to try and get new teeth. They cannot line the teeth up in my jaw, probably because the jawbone had been broken and the bones had been damaged. I've got false teeth but I never wear them, I can't.

If we were naughty, or so they said, we were sometimes punished in what we used to call battle stations. In the hall we would be stripped off in front of all the other kids and made to lie down on the ground. We were stretched...
out with a big kid on each arm and a kid on each leg and
held up in the air. The nuns hit us with drill sticks. I
don't know if you know what a drill stick is; in the army
days they used to be about 3 foot long and the size of a
broom handle. They were about 1.5 metres long or sometimes
we would be hit with a small whip. I remember being
punished for something I hadn't done.

I was thrashed with a drill stick across the bare skin
of my back and buttocks. About after 10 whacks the drill
stick broke. I still have scars on both sides of my torso
because the sticks broke on an angle. When I started to
bleed on the back, they turned me around to the other side
and whacked me again. I have the scars on my waist
straight across from where I was beaten, and I was bruised
everywhere.

This is bloody hard. I made a mess on the floor
because I was bleeding so much and I was in trouble again.
The nuns threw me in what they called a dungeon - or what
we called a dungeon - which was a four by four room away
from the orphanage down by the incinerator. That was where
I was left with a bucket, a soundproof door, a light above
me, there was no windows. For a bed, I had a concrete slab
and three or four hessian bags for blankets. I stayed down
there for about a month. I knew it was a month because
every Friday they used to burn the leftover papers from the
orphanage school classrooms, and that was right alongside
the dungeon. I'd hear the steel door opening and I could
smell the smoke.

Once, when I was in the classroom dusting and cleaning
the blackboards, some of the bigger kids came in and
stripped me down. The nun in charge came in and saw me
with no pants on, bare bum, no underpants in them days, and
I got into trouble again, as usual.

Aside from the physical and sexual abuse, I also
suffered mental abuse at St Joey's. Once every
three months we were paraded with about five or six other
kids to see if we were eligible to be fostered out or
adopted. I was always picked to stand in line when I was
working and I was in the dirtiest clothes of all. When I
did not get picked the nuns would turn around and say,
'Nobody wants you, nobody cares about you. You're just a
nobody'.

20/05/2015 (C78) C8212 G L HILL (Ms Furness)
Transcript produced by Merrill Corporation
Telling the police:

One day in the mid-1950s I was sent to the playground to get two or three other kids that hadn't come in for their afternoon tea. When I got to the playground, I saw them from in the distance getting under the fence into a paddock. I was yelling out to these kids to come back, but they told me they were going to get blackberries. Because I liked blackberries too, I followed them under the fence and picked blackberries in the wild blackberry bushes next to the old-fashioned sewerage dump.

After finding an old jam tin and filling it up after berry picking, the three kids came back to where I was, grabbed hold of me - and threw me, and I knew I was in trouble because these were bigger kids and a couple of them were pets of the nuns. They told me that, if I ever told the nuns where we had been and what we had been doing, I would be in big trouble; they would pound the shit out of me. The kids grabbed hold of me and threw me in the blackberry bushes which had huge thorns like roses. They left me there and headed back.

By the time I got out of the bushes, my overalls were torn to pieces and I was cut. It was getting dark, so I tried to retrace my steps back to St Joey's by following the pathway in between the bushes. I spotted a dim light and thought I was heading in the right direction. I was walking towards the light, but it turned out it was a little hut where they used to clean the cans from the sewerage. There was an old water tank, a basin and a bench. I went in and got a drink out of the tank, it tasted funny - and I found out later it was bore water. It was getting dark but the light of the hut at least let me see where I was. The weather was freezing, so I got up on the bench and there was two or three old bags on the bench which I got underneath and slept there for the night.

I woke up with a very sore head and realised I was lying in a clean and comfortable bed - I never had one of them before - in what I later learned was the Ballarat Base Hospital. I must have fallen off the bench and hit my head, because I had a headache - I had bandages on my head. I heard the door open and a woman in a white coat came in, followed by somebody in authority who was probably the matron, then a person in plain clothes and a policeman.
This is harder than I thought.

The woman in the white coat, who I think was the doctor, asked me how I got so bruised and battered at that stage. I had about six or seven teeth missing. When they opened my mouth and looked inside, they couldn't work out how a kid could be like this where the mouth was so badly damaged. They asked me why nobody had reported it.

The doctor asked me my name and what had happened. All I could say was '29'. As far as I was concerned, that was my name. She couldn't work out what this meant and I said, 'That's my name'. I tried to tell them about the abuse but it was pretty hard to do at the time because there was somebody in authority and, as kids, we had to be careful what we said to people in authority. I tried to explain to them that I came from the home, because I didn't know it was called St Joey's, that I was physically and sexually abused there and how I'd gotten scars on my body.

The copper in uniform turned around and said, 'No, he's just a runaway kid that we've been looking for, for nearly three or four days'. He said to the other people, 'Nobody does that sort of thing [the abuse], I know the Home. I know because we've picked up runaways before'. I said, 'I wasn't running away, all I was trying to do was have a feed'. He said to the other people, 'You're wasting your time'.

From that day on, I trusted no one. At that time I was talking to somebody in authority, somebody who you tell your kids they can look up to. But when you get that sort of reaction that I did, it was like talking to a brick wall. A lot of people do not understand that anybody could do that sort of thing to a child, but it did bloody happen.

When I came back to St Joey's, the guy in charge of the home, Don Warden, came to pick me up. He just threw me in the back of the old Chevy van - that's the van they used to have - he was a real brute and so cruel. I just wanted to die. I was put in the sick bay in the orphanage where they tied me down on a bed and had pads on my head and neck with wires coming out. They put a catheter - I didn't know what it was at the time, but I know now - they put a catheter in me and then another tube in my bottom so they didn't have to clean up the mess after me. There was a big light that shone into my face when I felt intense pain as
my head bounced off the bed. Then I heard noises again and I started to feel the pain again. It was like some sort of electric shock therapy. They wanted to know what I had told them at the hospital. To this day, I have never grown hair on the back part of my neck. I have long hair now, but that's to cover the hair that I can't grow. I don't know how many days that went on for.

After that, I was taken down to the dungeon again by the incinerator and locked in a room made out of limestone. There was a thick door with a peephole and a slot down by the floor, and I had wheat bags for blankets. I got bread and water morning and night. Sometimes I could not eat because my teeth hurt so much and I ended up feeding the bread to a little mouse, it was a little pet mouse I found. I was there for about over a month. Bloody cold down there too.

There was no one in St Joey's that I could complain to about the abuse. Home inspectors from the government used to come to St Joey's every three to six months. When they came, I was always hidden away with the other drones. We weren't allowed to speak or be anywhere near them. I knew they were coming because, every time they came, I was the one who had to arrange to make everything ready for the inspection. I had to spit and polish the two classrooms and, if the nuns saw a bit of dirt in there, I was in trouble again.

On inspection day, the inspectors used to come down and they'd go through these two classrooms. I never saw them inspecting or talking to any of the kids. Then they'd go down to the nun's parlour, have their scones and cream and jam. I knew about this because we used to cook for them. As kids, we were swept under the carpet, out of sight, out of mind.

Once we became old enough, the nuns used to hire us out to the parishioners to do certain jobs. Sometimes kids were away on these jobs for three months or more.

I was hired out to the church for two or three months at a time. I never got paid, I didn't know what money was for these jobs, but I presume St Joey's did. This is some of the places I went to: I travelled to Merbein near Mildura; Wentworth; a sheep farm in Hamilton; an eel farm in Apollo Bay.
In the 1950s, I was about 14 years old, I got sent to work at the priest's dad's place. This was the priest that sexually abused me in St Joey's. His dad was in his 60s and ran this [REDACTED]. It was about an hour's drive from --

Q. You can't say where it was from, Mr Hill.
A. Alright. "The priest's dad was suffering from emphysema and he had difficulty moving."

Some of these are blanked out so it's a bit hard to bloody read.

Q. Just read around the blanked out bits.
A. "Because he could be out of breath very quickly. He would get halfway up the stairs and I'd have to push him up the rest of the way to get him out.

The accommodation I had there was an old tool shed out the back, alongside the wood heap. The shed only had old-fashioned latch locks that would clip down, but they always slid out. I couldn't lock the doors properly. The shed was full of junk that I had to clean out to make it liveable.

[REDACTED]. He stayed in one of the units out the back of the place where I was working. From what I remember, the priest's cousin I suppose you'd call him, was in his 40s and the cousin or nephew was probably in his early 50s. The priest came and stayed sometimes on weekends.

The priest and his relative used to come into the shed together and sexually abuse me. One of them would hold me down and the other tied my legs up and blindfold me, so I had no chance of getting away. The priest and the relative took turns to abuse me. Sometimes the priest's dad came in and sat on me while this was happening. This lasted nearly nine months. When I actually tied the door from the inside to keep it closed, they just got wire cutters and cut it open. I had a fold-down cot to sleep on.

I used to try to think of other things while they were abusing me. I used to think about the babies and the kids I helped look after at St Joey's and try to put the abuse out of my mind. The worst part of this was, when they were
finished with me, my body would come back to reality and I had to deal with this and what had happened.

No one knew about what was happening because the place I worked at used to close at 6 o'clock, everybody left at that time. Every now and again there would be some boarders and electricity workers that stayed over. Maybe they heard my screams, I don't know.

There used to be an old blacksmith that lived with his wife in the lane at the back of the [REDACTED]. They were very kind and helped me fix up an old bike that was in the shed. He tried to get me to talk about what was going on, but I clammed up. He had seen the marks on my arms and I was too ashamed to tell, thinking he might think I'm dirty and I would lose a friend.

I worked at this place for about 11 months until the priest's dad went into hospital and the [REDACTED] closed down. I had to stay at the priest's sister's place nearby for about a weekend while the priest then picked me up and took me back to the home.

Finding my family:

In all the time I was at St Joey's, I had no idea I had two brothers and two sisters. I later found out that I had an older brother and a younger brother who went into St Joey's at different times to me. I also had two sisters who were in Nazareth House in Wendouree. The nuns did not tell me I had brothers at St Joey's while I was there.

When I was about 15 or 16 another kid, who I later learned was my younger brother, came up to the farm and told me to come down to the house to meet - this other woman. I didn't know I had a mother, so I stayed there - I stayed where I was. Don Warden then came up and took me to Sister Reginald. She hosed me down and changed - well, she didn't change my clothes - but I changed clothes, and took me to the nun's parlour where a woman was waiting with two nuns and now my younger brother that I didn't know at the time.

About two years later that woman came back to St Joey's to try and get my brother out of St Joey's. She couldn't take him because he was tied up with the welfare system, so I went to live with that woman instead.
Somewhere along the line, I slept under the couch. I slept in a cot in the lounge room because it was only a two bedroom place with that woman, her new husband and two boys who were my half-brothers.

I later found out that my sister started doing some family research after she finished school. This is from Nazareth House. She found our mother in Echuca who was a counsellor, a Justice of the Peace, head of the scouts in Echuca. My sister practically told her to do something about the kids or else she would let everyone know what she did to us. Not bad for somebody who was head of the community.

Three weeks after I moved in with that woman, I got a job at the ordinance factory. I worked there for about three years. I learned by observing others, other guys that worked, so I could pick up skills from them. I used to think, 'I can do better than that, quicker than that', and that was how I learnt and survived.

When they paid my wages - I didn't even know about money - when they paid my wages, my mother kept the notes and told me that she put it in my bank account and all I got was the small change. I used to keep the change and throw it in a tin because, not having gone to school, I didn't know really what money was or how to spend it. She opened up an account in the bank for me under - what do they call it - like a guidance, somebody in - I can't think of the word. But she had control over the money that was in the bank because I couldn't read or write so I couldn't open a bank account; I was too young.

I ran away from that home many times. When I ran away, I used to hide. I was virtually a street kid, but I still went to work every day and was always up early in the morning. I couldn't stand the other half-brothers that I found out I had, as they used to cut the toes of my socks off and I had to go to work with no toes in my shoes. I got blamed for everything that went wrong in that house because I was an outsider. I found out later that that woman had told my half-brothers that I was a friend's adopted kid that she was looking after for a bit to help her out.

After I finished my job at the ordinance factory, I got a job on the farm, and that suited me right down to the
ground because I was out there for about six years. I only
used to come into town once every three months - suited me.
My pay would go straight into a bank account. One day my
boss asked me, 'You can't read and write, Hilly, why don't
you bloody well learn?' He took me into an ABC shop and I
picked up a set of books with attached cassette tapes so
that I could teach myself how to read and write, since I
had never been taught at St Joey's.

Impact of abuse:

When I got out of St Joey's I didn't have any social
skills whatsoever and I couldn't relate to people. I used
to hide myself away. I felt like an outcast because of all
the rejections I got at St Joey's.

I could never smile when I was young. I was always in
the background, wearing dark clothes like a wallflower.
Look what I got on - like a wallflower in the corner. I'd
go into my own shell. It took a lot of years to come out,
but the nightmares never stopped.

I sometimes get into a mindset and think, how in the
hell did I ever survive all that happened to me? I really
don't know, but I did try and put myself in a different
place where I worked up to 18 hours a day. People said I
was a workaholic, which may be so, but through working such
long hours I tried to block everything out.

I married my wife when I was 28. We buried this sort
of stuff way down. Before my wife died, one of the last
things she said to me was that she hoped that one day I
could tell my story somewhere, start writing it and putting
it on paper so that other people, and my kids, would
understand.

I think my wife knew a little bit about what happened
to me, but I used to keep it hidden pretty well. When I
started writing my story on my computer, I could only do it
for a half hour at a time because it took me right back to
that time and it would be very painful. It has taken me
50 years to start to put it on paper and I had to
frequently stop because my eyes would start to swell up and
tears would trickle down my cheeks.

I still have difficulties going to bed at night and
sleeping because the memories come flying back at me. Most
of the jobs I have had were nightshift work, so I could nap in the day as I have trouble sleeping at night. It was hard, but I got by.

The smell of certain things can take me right back to those days or those times. Hair products, like Californian Poppy, Brylcreem, remind me of the priests. Diesel can take me back to when I was 5 years old, because the horror room smelled like diesel. Kerosene takes me back to when I was seven and a half years, because one of the workers on the farm used to use it in the boiler room. The smell of stale beer takes me back to the time working at the priest's dad's place. I shudder every time I smell beer. I don't drink.

I re-live these things all the time. One of the things I used to think when I was young was, 'Get away from the place as far as possible', so I did. I moved over to Western Australia, but it never gets away from the mind. It doesn't matter how far you go, you always take your memories with you.

This is a good part.

For many years my wife and I started helping foster children. Some were ex-orphanage kids who didn't have a job. I got them off the drugs and booze, found them jobs. I let them stay with us. In six months - yeah, stayed with us in six months - some of these kids, by this time they left us - in six months some of these kids had houses of their own, some of them got married, some of them went back to an organisation called VANISH - that's how I got hold of them ones - which led to more children coming to us. I don't know how the heck they got my bloody address, because VANISH is in Victoria and I'm in Western Australia.

The VANISH system provided an opportunity for state wards to reach out to other state wards who may have needed help. Over the years, my wife and I helped 26 foster children, which is a record of its own. Just a little bit of help for other people that needed help.

I sometimes think back and wonder how I came to be where I am today after what I went through. I've seen a lot of people who went through the system, who have committed suicide or are on drugs, who live on the streets or are in gaol. I often wonder what had happened to them.
Last year, I was awarded the Paul Harris Fellow award. (Holds up medal). Very proud of that. Just goes to show what you can make of yourself. Which is an award from the Rotary International - Rotary Club - for my volunteer work with cancer patients. I run the Cancer Self-Help and Wellness Centre at Gidgegannup in Western Australia, and I have got proof that I'm not forgotten. Now, because of all the achievements I have made over the years, I'm a survivor. Before that, I was just a pawn.

I want to make sure that kids who were sexually abused are not forgotten anymore. Somebody has to have a voice. This is one of the reasons I spoke to the Royal Commission. I want to speak on behalf of these kids, because they haven't got a voice.

I now have support from Find and Connect and Relationships Australia in Western Australia; also with Open Place over here. Without these groups, I would not have made it. They have meant that there is a friendly face when I open the door and somebody who understands what I've been through. I have now got a voice that I didn't have before. They made a monster out of me. I hope that groups like these will continue to be supported in the future.

I would like the government to start paying back victims. At St Joey's, the government inspectors would only see one classroom, they only saw the good side of St Joey's, but they did not see the poor kid who was scrubbing the stairs or the white hands and white knees we had from cleaning the staircases, because of the White King - and I hate that stuff, it makes me puke. They never actually saw the conditions we lived in. We were isolated. Foster families now are a lot different to what we used to go through.

The church:

The Catholic Church should be turned upside down. They made riches out of us. It's time they come out from behind the robes and pay out the poor they have robbed for so long.

Has anybody, and I mean anybody, bothered to do a count on how many of us forgotten ones died of broken
hearts from drugs, alcohol and suicides? I bet they haven't. They would run out of paper."

MS FURNESS: Thank you, Mr Hill.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone have any questions of Mr Hill?

DR MARICH: I just have a single question, if I may, Your Honour. I'm Mr Hill's legal representative, Martine Marich.

<EXAMINATION BY DR MARICH:

DR MARICH: Q. Mr Hill did you want to say anything further to the Commission about what you are hoping to achieve by giving your evidence?

A. Yes, I'd like the Commission, with their recommendations, when they do a final report, for kids that are on - some of us are still on the street, I've been fortunate enough to have good health and I'm not too bad at 72, so I'm still in pretty good nick. As I say, I'm as fit as a Mallee bull. But there's a lot of kids and a lot of other people that need, not only medical help, they need support, they need - it's counselling. My way of thinking of how I do my counselling to bring me out of the doldrums is, I meditate of a night-time; take 20 minutes of time, go into a quiet room and meditate and that gets me by.

But the church must pay. They say they're not an identity, but when they sell a place, the money goes to the church, so they are; so, in legal terms, if they can bloody well pick up their money when they sell something, they are a legal identity. So, as far as the law's concerned, they should be sued.

The State Government I'm going after, because their inspectors did not do their job. I've got records, five pages of records of 15 years in that home; no school records, was I a good boy or bad boy? Nothing. They should be brought into task. So, when the State Government says, oh, we can't afford it, we didn't know any better; stiff bickies as far as I'm concerned.

For other kids medical wise, I have trouble with my teeth and the only way I'm going to get teeth is if I get implants. But there's a lot of people who don't know how to get around to get medical advice. One of these
institutions that I go to now, like Lanterns, Relationships Australia, VANISH, Open Place, they must be kept open and not just shut down; they must be funded for the people that have got nowhere to go. They've got to have somewhere they can actually call their little niche so they can help themselves.

DR MARICH: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Gray?

MR GRAY: Your Honour, I have no questions for Mr Hill, but the Sisters of Nazareth who ran the St Joseph's Home in the 1940s and 1950s have asked me to say two things at this stage, if I may.

Firstly, the sisters received Mr Hill's statement only very recently, and he has not previously made a complaint to the Sisters.

Secondly, the Sisters wish to say to Mr Hill and to Your Honours and the Commissioner, that they support his allegations being fully investigated and that, although Mr Hill has so far chosen not to contact the Sisters, they are very willing to meet with him if he would like to. If the Commission pleases.

THE WITNESS: It's very hard to understand, I could hardly hear him.

THE CHAIR: You couldn't hear that?
A. No.

THE CHAIR: I'm sorry. Would you like to say it again, Mr Gray?

MR GRAY: Happy to do so, Your Honour.

THE CHAIR: I think you need to make sure that microphone is picking you up.

THE WITNESS: He had a paper in front of him.

MR GRAY: Can you hear me, Mr Hill?
A. Now I can, yes.

MR GRAY: The Sisters of Nazareth, whom I'm representing
today, have asked me to say two things, and the Commission has allowed me to say it.

The first is that the Sisters received your statement to the Royal Commission only very recently and, as you know, you have not previously made a complaint to the Sisters.

However, notwithstanding that, the Sisters wish to say to you, through me today and to the Commission, that they support your allegations being fully investigated, and that, although you have chosen so far not to contact the Sisters, they are very willing to meet with you if you should like to. Those are the two things that I said. If the Commission pleases.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

THE WITNESS: Can I reply to that?

THE CHAIR: Yes, Mr Hill.

THE WITNESS: Because, when I was - I come over to my brother's place from Western Australia as a surprise birthday party, my 70th birthday party. One of the relatives I hadn't met for a long time was one of my sister's sons come down from Queensland for a birthday party.

We arranged to go out to Nazareth House to show them where their mother was brought up. It was all arranged to go in, we were going to have a cup of coffee or cup of tea or whatever. I had come over to the Victorian Parliamentary Committee Senate Inquiry, and from that we were banned from going over to Nazareth House; the sisters didn't want to have anything to do with us.

So, I'm just replying to what you said then. If they wanted to meet me now, how come they didn't want to meet me when I was 70?

THE CHAIR: Very well. No doubt, Mr Hill, if you wanted to speak to Mr Gray after this hearing, he would welcome you having that discussion, but it's a matter for you, alright?

THE WITNESS: I just wanted to say that.
THE CHAIR: I understand. The offer is there for you to meet if you wish to meet, but that's a matter for you, alright. Otherwise, thank you for your evidence, you are now formally excused.

<THE WITNESS WITHDREW>

MS FURNESS: Your Honour, I understand there's an application for leave to appear.

MR TAAFFE: If the Commission pleases, I need to announce an appearance on behalf of Stephen Farrell. Leave was previously granted on 13 May. My name is Taaffe and I previously haven't made it to a microphone, but as I understand it leave has been granted.

THE CHAIR: Yes, thank you. The fact that Mr Hill couldn't hear Mr Gray is an occasion that I should remind all counsel that you need to make sure that your voice is being picked up by the microphone. I think one of the problems is the stem of the microphone, it is short, so you need to make sure you are talking into it if it's to be transmitted through the room, otherwise it's difficult to hear in this room.

Yes, Ms Furness.

MS FURNESS: I call the witness with the pseudonym [BAV].

<[BAV], affirmed: [11.12am]

<EXAMINATION BY MS FURNESS:

MS FURNESS: Q. You have been given the pseudonym [BAV] by the Royal Commission?
A. Yes, no, that's fine.

Q. You just need to speak into the microphone, if you can.
A. Is that better?

Q. That's better. You've made a statement that's dated 14 May?
A. Yes.

Q. You've got that with you?
A. Yes.

Q. The contents of that are true and correct?
A. Yes.

MS FURNESS: I tender that statement, Your Honour.

EXHIBIT #28-11 STATEMENT OF [BAV] DATED 14/05/2015

Q. Do you have a copy of your statement with black marks in it?
A. Yes.

Q. You do?
A. Page 8 of 12.

Q. Good, thank you.
A. 9 of 12.

Q. I invite you to read your statement but, if you can, where there's blacked out bits, just read around them and, where there's large blacked out bits, just avoid them and just read before and after the blacked out bits. Alright?
A. Yes.

Q. If you need any help, I'm happy to read any parts that you'd like me to. So, please start at paragraph 2.
A. Paragraph 2?

Q. Yes. That's where you say that you were born in 1960 and you are currently 54 years of age. Do you see that?
A. "My full name - I was born in 1960. I am currently 54 years old.


During my childhood, I attended St Alipius Catholic Church with my family. We went to mass every week and were very involved with the Catholic community. My parents were married at St Alipius Church and one of my uncles was a church elder.
On occasion priests and Christian Brothers and nuns would visit our family home. My family was synonymous with St Alipius Primary School and St Alipius Catholic Church.

I went to St Alipius Primary School for kindergarten and then changed to Brown Hill Primary School for Grade 3 only.

I went to St Alipius Primary School which was run by the Christian Brothers. My Grade 4 teacher was a female lay teacher. I can't recall her name.

In Grade 5 my teacher was Brother Edward Dowlan. Sometimes Dowlan took a boy to the back of the classroom and told the rest of the class not to turn around.

A couple of times I'd turn around and saw Brother Dowlan and a boy he had chosen very close together.

When I was in about Grade 5 and 6 Father Gerald Ridsdale was a priest in St Alipius Catholic Church. At the end of Grade 5 I became an altar boy. I mostly served on the altar for Father Ridsdale on Sundays. Father Ridsdale knew our family very well and he used to visit our home on occasions.

My Grade 6 teacher was Christian Brother Robert Best. Brother Best was also the school principal at St Alipius. The first time Brother Best abused me, I was in Grade 6. I do not remember the exact date. We were at Russell Square, which is the sports oval near the school. The reason we were there, we were playing football against each other. Brother Best was the umpire.

Towards the end of the game, I injured my shoulder. We were at the west end of Russell Square, opposite the dairy near the big trees on the corner of Scott Parade and Stawell Street. While the other two kids were kicking the ball around, I walked towards Brother Best complaining about my shoulder. Brother Best dropped my pants to my ankles and started touching me on the genitals.

The other kids were around but not in the immediate area. I found what he was doing at the time was quite embarrassing. The reason I stopped him was for fear of the other boys looking at us and laughing and calling out my name. Brother Best stopped very abruptly and I pulled up
my pants. I remember being treated a bit differently afterwards and ribbed about the incident by the other kids for a while.

Not long after the incident with Brother Best I was in the school yard and someone pinched me on my face. I looked up and saw it was Father Ridsdale and with him was Brother Best. Father Ridsdale just smiled at me.

Some time later I was in Grade 6 and I went to the beach with Father Ridsdale and some of the other boys from the school. We had to drive through Geelong to get there.

On the way back, I sat next to Father Ridsdale in the front passenger seat of the car. Father Ridsdale sexually abused me. I didn't know what to do. He stopped when the other boys came back to the car. I don't know why I agreed to do what he asked. I think it was because Father Ridsdale was a priest and was respected, especially in the eyes of my parents.

Another time, I was sorting out bottles in the shed behind the presbytery at St Alipius Catholic Church. Father Ridsdale was there and he started to touch me. He then took me into his bedroom in the presbytery and sexually abused me. As I was leaving the presbytery the other priest who lived there, Father George Pell, arrived home. I saw the back of Father Pell, but did not know if he saw me and Father Ridsdale or not.

On another occasion Father Ridsdale took me out in the bush in his car and sexually abuse me there. Afterwards he dropped me off at home and gave me a small amount of money from the console of his car.

Another Sunday I was the altar boy for Father Ridsdale. As I was packing things up after mass, Father Ridsdale started to fondle my genitals on the outside of my pants. While this was happening one of my brothers came to the door and told me to hurry up, mum and dad were waiting.

At the time all of these things took place, I wasn't in a position to tell anyone as I feared I wouldn't be believed. Priests had so much respect from parents and the like, Catholic families at that time almost idolised the local priest.
I have not gone into the details of my sexual abuse in this statement as the events were so personal and humiliating, it is exhausting for me to re-live them.

After I finished Grade 6 at St Alipius I went to Ballarat North Tech. I was there for four years. I did not pass Form 4. By the time I got to Form 4 I was not concentrating, I was playing up and lacked motivation. I hated school and people in authority.

I left school, went back to working as an apprentice for my uncle, who was a carpenter. I did this for about three years but I did not finish my apprenticeship.

When I was 16, I told my mum during an argument that I had been sexually abused. It didn't seem to register or maybe she just couldn't believe that such things could happen. I can't remember exactly what she did after that. Our relationship was broken and it never really healed. She later died in 1987.

I left home when I was 17. I went off the rails for some years and was drinking heaps.

In about 1980, one of my brothers was killed in a single car accident in Eureka Street, Ballarat. He was 19 years old. It was an unusual car accident, and I believe he deliberately drove his car into a pole. This brother had Brother Dowlan and then Brother Best as teachers at St Alipius. Although we did not specifically discuss such matters, deep in my heart I feel that he must have been sexually abused too.

My cousin, who was my age, shot himself when he was 20 years old. He told me he was sexually abused by Brother Best.

In 1981, when I was 21, I left the Ballarat area and moved to Queensland. I returned to carpentry for a while and moved around from job to job. I had bouts of depression throughout this period, but I felt better for being in Queensland, it gave me an opportunity to remove myself from the Ballarat community and try a fresh start.

I had lived in Queensland for 20 years. At one stage, I was going through quite a depression period. There was a
lot of newspapers at the time about clerical sexual abuse, this triggered thoughts about my abuse. I went to see a psychologist in Queensland in 1999. I was sick and very angry. I also knew there had been suicides in Ballarat and looking at the situation from a distance, I seemed so upset.

After having some sessions with the psychologist in Queensland between 1999 and 2001, I came back to Ballarat. Within 48 hours of returning I went to the Ballarat Police Station and spoke to Detective Sergeant Kevin Carson. In July 2001 I made a statement to the Victoria Police about the abuse by Brother Best and Father Ridsdale.

Later that same year, Detective Sergeant Carson arranged a meeting with the head of Department of Prosecutions, Paul Coghlan, at the Ballarat Police Station. I understood that this meeting was arranged because the Office of Public Prosecutions had decided not to charge Father Ridsdale with more offences. I went into this meeting with Detective Senior Sergeant Carson and two other members of the community involved with victims of sexual abuse. After this meeting Mr Coghlan agreed to charge Father Ridsdale.

Father Ridsdale was subsequently charged in relation to my complaint and pleaded guilty to sexual offences in relation to sexual abuse and also offences relating to other victims. I am not sure of the sentence he was given, but I don't think it would make much difference as Father Ridsdale was already in prison for other offences.

I made an impact statement about Father Ridsdale in which I tried to raise awareness of what I saw as suicide cluster involving other victims.

In 2002 I decided to go through the Towards Healing process. At this time I was staying with a friend in Ballarat. Broken Rites gave me the Towards Healing phone number, which I rang.

Some time after this a man arranged by Towards Healing came to where I was staying to interview me. I now believe he was a former police officer. I do not recall him telling me this, I don't recall his name. He took a statement about my abuse which I signed at the meeting. I didn't want to sign the statement, I wanted him to leave it
there so I could go and read through it. He put a lot of
demand on me to sign and in the lead-up to the Towards
Healing mediation. I went and saw Dr Kornan who was a
consultant medico-legal psychiatrist, he wrote a report
addressed to Deacons lawyers which says that I have a
number of really serious problems, including post-traumatic
stress disorder, together with chronic anxiety and
depression. The report says that Dr Kornan thought these
conditions were caused by the abuse. The report is dated
9 July 2002.

A Towards Healing mediation was arranged in Melbourne
on 8 August 2002. I couldn't find a solicitor to go with
me, so I contacted Broken Rites. Wayne Chamley, who is
known to the Broken Rites group, said he would come with
me, although is not a solicitor. I understand that Wayne
is a volunteer advocate for the clergy abuse victims. The
mediator was David O'Callaghan.

When I arrived at the mediation process, there were
eight people in the room from the Catholic Church. They
included Bishop Peter Connors, who was the Bishop of
Ballarat at the time, Brother Brandon from Christian
Brothers. We had to wait around in the room for quite a
while because the solicitor acting for the Catholic Church
was flying in from Sydney, he had been delayed. I found
all of this pretty intimidating.

I was awarded $80,000, six visits to a counsellor and
a verbal apology. The apology felt pretty empty to me. It
felt like I was just part of the process, going through the
motions. I didn't attend the counselling sessions they
offered. I didn't trust the councillor they referred me to
as it seemed to me that she was working for or with the
Catholic Church. I doubted her independence.

After the mediation David O'Callaghan gave me the
phone number for a solicitor called Vivian Waller from
Maurice Blackburn Cashman. I decided not to accept the
offer of settlement at that time. Instead, I contacted
Ms Waller for legal advice.

I consulted Ms Waller a few times and it was necessary
for her to investigate my case. I arranged for an
independent psychiatric assessment and she asked me to get
together details of my loss of earnings over the years,
which I felt was caused by the abuse. She said we needed a
little time to do this, it was important to help form a
view around the appropriate amount of compensation to seek
in my claim.

In November 2002, I understand Ms Waller wrote to the
solicitor handling the matter for the church related
defendants, Mr Paul Gamble, then at Deacons, and asked him
to hold the offer open while she investigated and prepared
my case, and she suggested to them that there be a further
mediation in a few months where I could be legally
represented. Ms Waller told me at first Mr Gamble agreed
to hold the offer open. Then in December 2002 he sent a
letter saying the offer would lapse if I had not accepted
it by 16 December 2002, and they had already been to
mediation and that there would not be another. I was
disappointed by their hard attitude. I decided to let the
offer lapse while we prepared the case. If they would not
negotiate, I had no choice but to prepare to issue a case.

I understand that on 6 May 2003 Mr Gamble sent a
letter to Ms Waller asking whether or not the offer of
$80,000 would be accepted, despite the fact that he'd told
us that it would lapse if I accepted it by 16 December.
She contacted me to discuss and advise and that she thought
the offer was too low and that I should not accept it.

I was quite upset and angry and confused, being jerked
around. About this time I had been to a friend's funeral
that was conducted at St Alipius, and it had spun me out.
I had enough and I could not go on.

I decided to resolve my case without legal
representation. Without the knowledge of my solicitor, who
recommended I not accept the $80,000. I contacted the
mediator from Towards Healing, Mr David O'Callaghan, and
told him I wanted to accept the offer of $80,000. I did
not think to ask them to cover the cost of my legal
expenses.

The next week I rang Ms Waller, and told her I
resolved my claim. She was concerned about this. We
agreed to part company. We sent a letter detail - sorry.
I'll start at --

Q. Paragraph 45.
A. "The next week I rang Ms Waller and told her I had
resolved my claim. She was concerned about this. We
agreed to part company. She sent me a letter dated
19 May 2003, saying that she was concerned about my
well-being and confirming that she no longer acted for me.

I understand Ms Waller sent Deacons a letter dated
21 May 2003, saying she no longer acted on my behalf.

I signed a release Deacons sent to me on 26 June 2003.
They sent me a copy of the fully executed release back to
my home address in September 2003.

I resolved my claim against the church for $80,000
because I was feeling stressed and could not go on. I
later came to regret this. It was against my solicitor's
advice that I accepted this amount. The church's lawyers
stuffed me around and then signed me up to a settlement
when they knew I was not represented and they knew from
Dr Kornan's report I had a number of serious psychological
conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder,
anxiety, depression, substance abuse problems.

I met with Bishop Peter Connors some time later.

My legal fees for the work performed by Ms Waller
amounted to $9,621.

After the settlement, I met with Bishop Connors
several times and spoke to him about the concerns that the
victims of child sexual abuse in Ballarat were committing
suicide or dying prematurely.

In about 2004, after George Pell was made Cardinal, it
was announced that he would visit Ballarat and be presented
with the keys to the city.

I had lunch with Peter and asked him to reconsider
having Cardinal Pell visit for this occasion. He said it
would go ahead regardless.

Years after making my initial police statement about
Father Ridsdale and Brother Best's abuse, I met with
Detective Sergeant Carson again. He told me that he wanted
to charge Brother Best with child sex offences.

Brother Best was charged with my complaint and the
complaints of about 14 other victims, including one of my
brothers.
Brother Best pleaded not guilty. In about 2009 there was a committal hearing.

One of my brothers also made a complaint to the police that Brother Best had sexually abused him. I understand that he gave a statement to the police in 2001. During the course of the criminal proceedings my brother hung himself. He did not survive to see the outcome of the criminal case.

After my brother died, I went to a meeting with Bishop Connors. I told him I was going to raise awareness about the suicides. He just nodded and didn't respond. My impression was that he did not want to recognise the problems in relation to the suicides and premature deaths in Ballarat.

I had to give evidence in court against Brother Best. It was nerve racking. I was on edge for about a month before. Being cross-examined was pretty gruelling. He was convicted of sexual offences against me and sentenced in 2011.

I wrote a victim impact statement. I wanted this to be read out because I thought it was too emotional to do it. The second half of the statement talked about the suicides. This wasn't allowed to be read out in court; I don't know why.

At some time I came to understand that the Christian Brothers were paying about $10,000 a day for Brother Best's defence barrister. I had failed school, I didn't complete my apprenticeship, I had been raped, I was dysfunctional, I had a very intimidating experience.

I couldn't work properly after my brother died and while Brother Best was on trial. I did the odd bits and pieces to get by, but I wasn't making any money. This period was pure hell.

I understand that in April 2013 Bishop Bird gave evidence in the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry.

I understand that on Friday, 3 May Brother Brandon from the Christian Brothers gave evidence at the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry.
I understand that Brother Brandon also gave evidence.

My experience with Detective Senior Sergeant Kevin Carson throughout this whole process was fantastic. If it wasn’t for him, I believe neither Gerald Ridsdale nor Brother Best would have been brought to justice. To me, Detective Senior Sergeant Carson is a top bloke.

After the criminal cases were concluded, I got back in touch with Ms Waller. She was now Dr Waller, and running the firm Waller Legal. With her help, a Sentencing Act application was issued against Best. In addition, even though I had again ... she agreed to try and reopen the case and seek further compensation from the Diocese of Ballarat and the Christian Brothers.

In 2013 I went to a mediation. I was represented by Dr Waller and Timothy Seccull of counsel. Bishop Paul Bird, the new Bishop of Ballarat, came along. I took my friend, Anthony Foster with me for support. I decided to seek further compensation because I wanted to be treated equally and fairly by the Catholic Church. I was offered another compensation amount of $80,000, which I was concerned was not enough given the terrible impact of the abuse upon me. I told Bishop Bird this. During the course of my meeting Bishop Bird told me that he could not offer me any more, the money was coming from the parishioners’ plate. I understood him to mean that the Diocese of Ballarat could not offer me any more. Ultimately I accepted a further payment of $90,000 which was inclusive of legal costs and disbursements.

Personal impact of abuse:

I failed miserably in school because I could not concentrate and became angry, disruptive, anti-authority. I started abusing alcohol when I was 16 years old. When I started drinking, it brought a lot of anger out. It brought a lot of depression and it also brought a lot of dysfunction. I grew up awkward with no social confidence.

I have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic anxiety, depression, and alcoholism. I have had substance abuse problems with drugs and alcohol. I have lost my drivers licence on multiple occasions.

At 18 years of age I attempted to commit suicide by
cutting my wrists. I tried to gas myself in my car after my friend committed suicide following Cardinal Pell being presented with the keys to the city in 2004.

I'm broke, I don't own a home, I barely manage to pay my bills. I don't have any superannuation, I don't have any private health insurance.

The abuse has cost me my marriage, and relationships. I'm single and can't ever see myself being in another relationship.

I believe the church's handling of the abuse has, in some ways, been worse than the initial sexual abuse that occurred.

The abuse might be historic, but the suicides by victims of sexual abuse are still going and is still happening.

Five men who were in my class at St Alipius have, in my view, committed suicide. I know an additional nine men who went to St Alipius I believe have since committed suicide.

The suicides have left an impact on me too. I have been and continue to be impacted by the grief and loss of losing other victims of Brother Best to suicide, some of whom were my family, brothers and cousins. I have had to bury people as a result of the trauma caused by these crimes. I have had to go to funerals where the person took their own life. I knew they were childhood sexual assault victims of Brother Best. I live with this knowledge and grief every day.

After Brother Best was sentenced I went on the 7.30 report on ABC with Detective Senior Sergeant Carson to raise awareness about suicides. I am proud we did this. I also appeared in an article in The Age with Chrissie and Anthony Foster around the same time.

There have, however, been negative consequences as a result of me speaking out about the sexual abuse. I have been excluded from social events, experienced forms of bullying in the community and have lost work and opportunities. I believe that some people refuse to hire me because I have spoken out against the Catholic Church.
Supporting survivors in the future:

In Ballarat I know survivors who have issues with alcohol abuse, drug abuse and depression. I believe there is not enough understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse and there is inadequate support and services provided to victims of child sexual abuse.

I believe there should be compensation or some form of pension provided to victims of child sexual abuse.

Many organisations recognise that post-traumatic stress disorder or other psychological problems can arise from work related incidents, car accidents or military service. These people have access to ongoing medical care as needed through arrangements such as Workcover, TAC or military healthcare cards. They also have access to weekly pensions if they cannot work. I feel very strongly that the Catholic Church should provide the same kind of ongoing medical assistance on an 'as needs' basis and the same kind of wage support if it is needed."

MS FURNESS: No questions, Your Honour.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone else have any questions? No. Thank you, Mr [BAV], thank you for your statement and your evidence, you are now excused, and we'll take the morning adjournment.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW

SHORT ADJOURNMENT

THE CHAIR: Yes, Ms Furness.

MS FURNESS: Your Honour, I call Neil Wileman.

<NEIL BRENDON WILEMAN, sworn: [12.03pm]

<EXAMINATION BY MS FURNESS:

MS FURNESS: Q. Would you tell the Royal Commission your full name?
A. Neil Brendon Wileman.

Q. Mr Wileman, you made a statement on 23 April
this year?
A. That's right.

Q. You don't have a copy of it with you?
A. Not with me, no.

Q. We'll give you a copy. The contents of that statement, Mr Wileman, are true and correct?
A. Yes.

MS FURNESS: I tender the statement.

EXHIBIT #28-12 STATEMENT OF NEIL BRENDON WILEMAN DATED 23/04/2015

MS FURNESS: I invite you to read your statement and if you'd like me to take over at any stage, happy to do so.
A. Okay.

"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.

My full name is Neil Brendon Wileman. I am 55 years old.

I was born in North Melbourne and I lived with my mum, dad and two younger sisters. I started primary school when I was 4 years old. I started at Broadmeadows Primary School. About two years later, my parents moved to Frankston and I moved to a Catholic School nearby.

About two years after starting at the Frankston school my parents divorced. My father won custody of the children so my two sisters and I resided with him in Melbourne. My mother had issues with alcohol and was living somewhere in St Kilda, Melbourne, at the time.

I went to St Francis Xavier College in Ballarat for half of Year 5 and Year 6 in 1972. At the age of 11 I started at St Patrick's College, Ballarat. My father was a sales representative and was regularly travelling overseas for work. He was unable to look after us while he was away, so I was sent to full-time boarding school. My two sisters were both at Sacred Heart College - that's
incorrect - Ballarat, a girls' boarding school. My father thought I would get a good education at a Ballarat Catholic School.

As a boarding student at both St Francis and St Patrick's, I resided in a dormitory that was located on the school grounds. The dormitory was a big room with rows of beds where all the kids slept. For each dormitory there was a dormitory master who lived in a cubicle with no roof at the end of the dormitory. The dormitory master was responsible for the welfare of the kids, ensuring that they got ready for school each day, ate their meals, did their homework, and was also responsible for discipline.

When I started at St Patrick's in 1972, the dormitory master in my house was Brother Ring. During the year, either late 1972 or early 1973, Brother Ring went on retreat when he was absent from the school for a while. When Brother Ring was away, Brother Dowlan took over as a dormitory master. Dowlan was also a teacher at the school.

Initially, I enjoyed boarding school. I made some good friends and really enjoyed the sport. I was doing well academically, passing all of my subjects. There was a close bond between the boarding students because there was only about 20 boys in my dormitory.

In the early part of 1973, I had turned 12 years old. I remember, it was a school day about 4.30 in the afternoon, just before tea. I had walked back from class to the dormitory. There was no one else at the dormitory and I was on my way to the toilet when Dowlan signalled to me from his cubicle at the end of the dormitory and said, 'Come here'. I was about 10 metres away from him. I walked towards him and he said, 'Come closer'. I moved very close to him. Dowlan then leaned over with his head close to me and smelt my breath. He said, 'Have you been smoking cigarettes?' I said, 'Yes, sir'. Dowlan then hit me across the head twice with an open hand, the force of him hitting me caused me to fall to my knees on the ground. Dowlan took out his keys, unlocked the door to his cubicle and said to me, 'Come in'.

Once inside his room, Dowlan hit me a couple more times across the head with an open hand and I fell to the floor again. He told me to stand up and then he started rubbing my penis on the outside of my clothes. Dowlan then
unzipped my pants, put his hand inside my zipper and
touched my penis directly. I think he was trying to get me
aroused by holding and rubbing my penis. I felt sick and
disgusted by what Dowlan was doing. I was too scared to
move away from him or try to stop him as he had already hit
me several times across the head and I did not want to get
hit again.

Dowlan continued to sexually abuse me for
several minutes. He then zipped up my pants and told me to
go. He did not say anything else at the time and I did not
tell anybody as I was scared of what would happen to me,
and I was embarrassed and disgusted by what had happened.

Dowlan continued to sexually abuse me and the
incidents occurred either in Dowlan's cubicle or in the
back of the classroom when we did our evening classes at
7.30pm. The evening classes were held for us to do our
homework. The classroom contained all the boarders from my
school year. Often there would be other people nearby and
Dowlan seemed a bit rushed, often just touching me on the
penis. When Dowlan was abusing me at the back of the
classroom, it was done where the other boys would have been
able to see if they turned around. They knew not to turn
around or they would have copped some physical abuse.

There was one other boarding student that I knew this
happened to as well. He and I discussed the sexual abuse
we were suffering at the hands of Dowlan.

On one occasion, about the fourth time Dowlan sexually
abused me, we were in his cubicle in the dormitory. I
think it was an afternoon after class or on a weekend. It
was a couple of weeks after the first time Dowlan abused me
and I was in his cubicle because Dowlan suspected me of
smoking again. He hit me several times across the head
with an open hand and said something to me about smoking
but I can't recall what he said. Dowlan then started
rubbing my penis through my clothes again, proceeding to
unzip my pants and put his hand inside my clothes, touching
my penis. He then pulled my pants down and started sucking
my penis. I did not get an erection and I felt dirty,
frightened and cold. After about 10 minutes he pulled my
pants up, hit me a few more times across the head and sent
me away. During the abuse he did not say anything to me.

Dowlan sexually and physically abused me approximately
two or three times a week for about 12 months. I was often at the school on weekends and during school holidays when a lot of the other boys had gone home. There were not many people around at these times and it was easy for Dowlan to find opportunities to abuse me.

The abuse consisted of Dowlan touching me or sucking my penis. He did not expose himself to me and did not ask me to touch him.

When Dowlan first began abusing me, I put up with it because the sexual abuse usually meant less physical abuse. Dowlan was regularly hitting me with his favourite method, being to hit me across the head with an open hand. The sexual abuse seemed like a better option at the time, but once Dowlan began performing oral sex on me, I couldn't take it any more.

About September or October 1973 I ran away from school. I went to my dad's place in North Melbourne and told him the Brothers at the school were hurting me. I didn't tell him I was being sexually abused because I was ashamed and embarrassed about it. I was also really confused at this time because I had always believed that sex only took place between a man and a woman. Dad told me that he had spoken to the headmaster at St Patrick's, Brother Nangle. Dad said, 'If they do it again, report it to Brother Nangle'. The next day, dad took me back to St Pat's.

When I got back to St Pat's Dowlan continued to sexually abuse me. I approached Brother Nangle like my father told me and told him that Dowlan was hurting me. I was not able to tell him about the sexual abuse at the time. Nangle said that he would talk to Dowlan. A short time later, Dowlan approached me at school and called me a dobber. I was punished for complaining but it did not stop the abuse; in fact, it made Dowlan more aggressive. I didn't complain to anyone at school again.

When I spoke to Nangle, he didn't seem shocked at all. He was very business-like about it. Whilst I didn't tell him about the sexual abuse, he asked no questions to find out exactly what was going on. Had he been more sympathetic and nurturing, I may have opened up to him about the abuse.
The sexual abuse by Dowlan continued until I left the school.

In 1973, when I was in form two, Brother Ring returned to the school after several months away on retreat. When he returned, he did not go back to being the dormitory master, but was a maths and science teacher and music teacher.

Very soon after returning to the school, Ring began sexually abusing me. After school, the boys had to shower in the dormitory. Ring would come and stand around the shower and locker room watching the boys shower. After my shower, Ring would come up to me and fondle my genitals in the locker room. There were often other boys around the area but not in the immediate vicinity.

Ring also abused me in the music room. After dinner, students were able to ask permission to go to the music room to practise. This was a chance to go and practise music on my own. Sometimes Ring would come to the music room when I was there and abuse me in the music room.

Ring sexually abused me about a dozen times in total. He continued to abuse me until I ran away from the school for good."

I don't understand why this has been blacked out.

Q. If you just read around the blacked out bits.
A. Yes, but I don't understand why his name's been blacked out.

Q. The Royal Commission is required to do its work in such a way that doesn't impede or prejudice current or future ongoing criminal proceedings and civil proceedings, so any name that's been redacted has been redacted in order to satisfy that. Do you understand?
A. No, I don't. This man's passed away, so there's obviously no upcoming criminal proceedings outstanding.

Q. I suspect that we have found that he's not passed away, Mr Wileman.
A. Okay.

THE CHAIR: Do we know?
MS FURNESS: Yes, we know he's not passed away.

THE CHAIR: Very well.

THE WITNESS: My mistake, I thought he had passed away. Just wishful thinking.

THE CHAIR: That's the reason, you understand.

THE WITNESS: Right, okay.

"Brother [REDACTED] was also a teacher at St Patrick's. I can't recall exactly what he taught. He was very physically abusive. He would regularly hit students across the head with an open hand for minor misdemeanors.

The Brother also sexually abused me during the same period as both Dowlan and Ring were abusing me. He assaulted me about three or four times whilst I was at St Patrick's. He would somehow get me alone in a classroom and would touch me on the outside of my clothes.

I continued to run away from school. On one occasion in 1973 I went to dad's place and told him the Brothers were still hurting me. I still did not tell him about the sexual abuse because of my shame and embarrassment. Dad was not travelling as much at this time. Dad allowed me to stay with him and I started attending St Mary's School in North Melbourne. I stayed with dad for the rest of 1973 and for a few months at the start of 1974.

During this time I got myself into some trouble with the police and I ended up before the Children's Court. After the court matter was finished, I was sent back to St Pat's as a boarding student again. I was told that I would be made a ward of the state if I did not return to boarding school.

When I went back to St Patrick's I continued to be sexually abused by Dowlan, Ring, and [REDACTED].

Once I turned 13 years old I was able to stand up for myself a bit more. I became more defiant. I wasn't as scared of them as I was when I was 12. I ran away again and this time the school expelled me and I was not allowed to return.
By this time, dad had remarried and was living in Albert Park. I went to live with him and I attended Albert Park High School. I left school when I was 15 years old.

I never told Nangle about the sexual abuse by Ring or [REDACTED] because, when I told him about Dowlan, nothing improved; in fact, Dowlan had become worse. I did not want to suffer any more than I currently was, so I kept quiet.

The first people I told about my sexual abuse were some mates from school. They had not been abused themselves. They were very supportive. I was about 20 years old at the time.

I was closer to my mum than my dad, and also around the age of 20 I told her about the abuse I had suffered. She was very angry about what had happened to me. She was also supportive.

I first mentioned the sexual abuse I had suffered to my father when I was 20 years old. I told him what had been done to me and how upset I was by it. Dad believed me when I told him, but his response was essentially, 'There is not much you can do about it now, except try to move on'.

I was working as a laboratory technician and one day during a break at work I opened up The Herald Sun newspaper. There was a report in relation to sexual abuse at St Alipius School in Ballarat. On page 2 of the paper there was a silhouette picture of Dowlan. I recognised him straight away from the shape of his head.

According to the news report, Dowlan moved from St Alipius School to St Pat's School. Dowlan had been charged with child sex offences. Seeing this news report inspired me to report the abuse I had suffered to the police.

On 30 October 1996 I attended Newport police station and reported the abuse I had suffered. I provided a signed statement to the police.

At the time that I reported to the police, I believed that Dowlan would be charged with offences perpetrated against me. Dowlan was not charged in relation to offences
against me, but I don't know why. I thought, what happened
to me would be dealt with concurrently with other charges.

I had also reported to the abuse by Ring and
[REDACTED] to the police, but the police told me that they
had both died, so there was no way to proceed with charges.
They were able to get away with abusing kids without any
punishment at all.

About two years ago, in 2013, I was approached by a
colice officer from Task Force SANO. He told me the police
were revisiting Dowlan and were looking at charging him
with the offences he committed against me. He asked me,
'Would you be on board or not?' I replied, 'Yes'.

The matter proceeded for both my charges and charges
relating to 19 other boys who had been abused by Dowlan.
Dowlan pleaded guilty to a number of charges. I provided a
victim impact statement but did not read the statement to
the court. Dowlan was convicted and sentenced to a total
of six years in prison with a non-parole period of three
years. I believe the DPP are currently appealing the
sentence.

I was very disappointed with the sentence. I would
expect this sort of sentence for someone who committed
burglaries, not someone who had abused 20 boys over an
extended period of time and ruined so many lives.

About 2001 a friend in Broken Rites told me about
civil litigation. I had five years to make a claim from
when I reported it to police in 1996. I had a Family Court
matter at the time where I was fighting to get access to my
own kids. My ex-wife's lawyer said I was using child abuse
as an excuse for drinking and I wasn't fit to have access
to my two sons. This was the catalyst for me to seek
compensation, so I could prove I was not lying about the
abuse.

I got on a train to Frankston the next day. I
approached a solicitor, David Forster who had been
recommended by Broken Rites.

Shortly after meeting with Forster I attended a
mediation session. I think the mediation was in 2002. I
remember that a senior member of the Christian Brothers was
at the mediation, but can't recall his name. I sat in a
room with Forster while a mediator went between me and the Christian Brothers with offers. An offer was made for $75,000. Forster thought this was about as much as I could get, so he advised that I should take it. I agreed to settle for that amount. It wasn't about the money, it was about credibility. Out of the $75,000, I had to pay $25,000 to solicitors for costs. I think the church should have agreed to pay my costs.

The senior member of the Christian Brothers apologised to me for what had happened and invited me back to the church. I refused but felt somewhat vindicated. I didn't feel that the apology that was offered was sincere and it didn't mean anything to me.

I have a juvenile criminal record. I was angry at what had happened to me as a child and I thought to myself, 'Well, if you can break the law, I can also break the law'. Mostly, my behaviour involved theft and property damage. I spent time in a number of juvenile detention centres.

I moved out of home at a relatively young age and have always struggled to get work. I do have a Certificate III in fitness. I am a qualified personal trainer. I also have a diploma of applied science in chemistry from the University of Victoria. While I have these qualifications, I feel that the abuse has stopped me from realising my potential and making the most of my skills. I have always suffered from low self-esteem, which does not go away.

I suffer from depression and have been on anti-depressant, antipsychotic and sleeping medication. I have abused alcohol and made several suicide attempts. I am currently taking antipsychotic medication.

The abuse has greatly disrupted my family life. All of my relationships with family have been ruined. I have had difficulty forming relationships. Both of my sisters have passed away. My mum passed away a couple of years ago. We had a good relationship and I looked after her before she died. My father is currently living in Thailand. I don't see him. My ex-wife has been successful in preventing me having a relationship with my sons. They are currently 29 and 22 years old. I do not see them.

Approximately three or four of my close friends have submitted suicide. One of my school friends who committed
suicide when I was about 18 particularly upset me. This friend found out about the rape of his brother and went and physically assaulted Dowlan. He then drove into the bush and hooked a hose up to his car. What a waste of life.

He committed suicide when I was about 18. I didn't even learn about it until later. He wasn't even abused himself. His little brother was raped by Dowlan and he just couldn't deal with it. It makes me furious that Dowlan has caused the death of someone he didn't even abuse.

I would like to see a greater emphasis on the needs of victims to see them get what they need. There is a huge suicide rate of victims from Ballarat and part of the problem is that victims just don't feel like they can trust anyone. I tried to tell people, but I was either not believed or people just didn't care.

Those responsible for covering up the abuse are almost as much to blame for what has happened as those who committed the abuse. There was too much emphasis on protecting the reputation of institutions like the Catholic Church and not enough emphasis on protecting the children."

Q. Mr Wileman, I understand that you wish to make a few additional comments?
A. I just want to say something, yes. Something happened since I gave this evidence.

I would just like to say something in addition to my statement that has happened to me since providing my statement to the Royal Commission.

My sister recently told me that she does not want me to be around my 5 year-old nephew. She told me that this was because she recently read an article that said that those that had been sexually abused in the past would go on to be abusers themselves.

As a result, I am not allowed to have any contact with my nephew and I no longer have any contact with my sister.

I do not know what article it is that she read, but I believe it's a commonly held opinion. You just have to go onto the internet.
This offended and hurt me significantly. As a victim of sexual abuse, I am even more sensitive to protecting children. I want the Royal Commission to find that this thinking of the abused becoming abuser is totally wrong. As survivors, we have enough to deal with, without this further victimisation.

MS FURNESS: Thank you, Mr Wileman.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone have any questions for Mr Wileman? No. Now, Mr Wileman, you may leave the witness box, and thank you, you are excused.

<THE WITNESS WITHDREW>

MS FURNESS: Your Honour, might I indicate that Associate Professor Carolyn Quadrio is giving evidence next week. One of the aspects of her evidence will be the matter raised by Mr Wileman; that is, what academic literature there is available in respect of abusers having been abused.

I call Timothy Green.

<TIMOTHY ANDREW GREEN, affirmed: [12.28pm]

<EXAMINATION BY MS FURNESS:

MS FURNESS: Q. Would you tell the Royal Commission your full name?
A. Timothy Andrew Green.

Q. Mr Green, you provided a statement to the Royal Commission dated 22 April this year?
A. That's correct.

Q. You have a copy of that with you?
A. Yes, I do.

Q. Are the contents of that true and correct?
A. Yes, they are.

MS FURNESS: I tender that.

EXHIBIT #28-13 STATEMENT OF TIMOTHY ANDREW GREEN DATED 22/04/2015
Q. I invite you to read this statement, Mr Green.
A. "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.

My full name is Timothy Andrew Green. I was born in
1961. I am currently 53 years old.
I was born and raised in Ballarat with my mum, dad and
my older brother. My parents were not strong Catholics,
but we considered ourselves church-going Catholics. We
used to go to mass every Sunday.

In 1966 when I was 4 years old I started school at
St Francis Xavier College, Villa Maria, which was a school
run by the Sisters of Mercy nuns.

As a child I was sexually abused by a person I came
into regular contact with. He was four years older than
me. I was abused by him on a regular basis, I would say on
every occasion that I saw him, which was fortnightly. I am
not sure when it started, but I don't remember it not
happening to me. He abused me until I left Ballarat to go
to university in 1979. This person was a student at
St Alipius Primary School and one of his teachers was
Brother Robert Best.

In 1973, I commenced high school at St Patrick's
College, Ballarat as a day student. I was 11 years old
when I started and I was the youngest student in my year.
Brother Edward Dowlan was my teacher for many subjects,
including maths, English and religious studies. The
headmaster of the school at the time was Brother Paul
Nangle.

On one occasion during Form 1 my whole class was
invited to a sleepover at a fellow student's home. We
camped out in the yard. Brother Dowlan was at the
sleepover. Dowlan was the only adult that was present at
the sleepover. I recall that Neil Diamond's album,
'Hot August Night', had just been released and we listened
to this music throughout the night. We played lots of
games and I was having a fun time. Dowlan was very
involved in the games and all the students vied for his
attention. All the students wanted to be his favourite and
get his attention.

The sleeping arrangements at the sleepover were in tents and the kids slept in their own sleeping bags in the tents. I was in a tent with some other boys but I can't recall how many or who they were. During the night I woke to find Dowlan lying beside me with his hand inside my pyjama pants fondling my genitals. When I looked at him, he stopped and said to me in a low voice, 'You are having a bad dream, go back to sleep'. He gave me a little shake as if to reassure me everything was all right and then left.

At one time Dowlan was my physical education teacher. He was quite rigorous with his lessons and on one occasion made me run until I was physically sick. I sat down on a bench seat and Dowlan sent the rest of the class off on another run around the oval. Dowlan then came to me and stood behind me with one hand on my shoulder and the other on my stomach. He began rubbing my stomach up and down, telling me he would ease my pain. Dowlan then moved his hand down inside my shorts and again fondled my genitals. My penis became erect and Dowlan told me I was a good boy. This made me cry as I was very embarrassed and upset by what he was doing. I was also concerned that some of the other students would see what was happening. As the other boys came around the oval towards us Dowlan removed his hand from my shorts.

At the completion of the physical education lessons Dowlan would always ensure that we all had a shower. The showers consisted of a wall with four shower heads. Dowlan required all of the boys to strip naked, even the ones who could not shower because all the showers were occupied. Dowlan would sit amongst the boys looking at us all.

The last time Dowlan abused me was in the classroom. The class was full of students and he sent me to the back of the classroom during class, to a place where all the boys' jackets were hung on the wall. After a time Dowlan came to where I was. We were behind the other students and they could only have been able to see us if they turned around. Of course, no one turned around because they would be sent to stand there too. He cupped my face in his hands, then slapped me across the face hard enough to make me cry. Once I was upset, he comforted me by cupping my face in his hands again and started thrusting his hips towards me as he was whispering to me. I can't recall what
he said, but I said to him, 'This is not fair, I can't fight back'. He just stopped and let go. That was the last time Dowlan tried to touch me.

The kids at St Pat's used to snigger about Dowlan's behaviour and say things like, 'He's touching the kids again'. There were particular boys at school who were given more attention by Dowlan. There were only two boys in my class that I never saw being sent to the back of the classroom. I remember many boys would return to their desks crying after being at the back of the classroom with Dowlan.

Everyone in the class knew what was going on but it was never discussed. We used to say 'he's', that's Dowlan, 'he's got him again, he's got him again, he's touching him again'. It was common knowledge among the students in my year that Dowlan was abusing many of the boys at the school.

The boys that Dowlan seemed to particularly favour were generally boys who were not as strong or mature as some of the other boys in our grade.

I find it inconceivable that none of the Brothers, lay teachers, the nurse, or even some of the parents knew about the abuse by Dowlan. It was just so blatantly obvious and every boy in the class knew their turn was going to come up at some stage.

Around late 1974, when I was 12 or 13 years old, I went to Eureka swimming pool in a Ballarat with two of my friends. Both of my friends went to St Alipius Primary School and then on to St Patrick's.

We were in the changing room when Father George Pell walked in. Father Pell was an old St Patrick's boy, he used to say mass there occasionally. Pell was a big imposing figure, he strutted around the college when he was there as if he was superior to everyone else. Because of that, I just assumed he was superior. I don't think Father Pell would have known our names but he would have known we were students from St Patrick's. He would have known my two friends from St Alipius and knew me from Villa Maria. In fact, I was the student who thanked him on behalf of the school community for his attendance at a school function on one occasion.
Father Pell came into the change rooms and said something like, 'G'day boys', and went and stood behind us and started getting changed. Then I just said something like, 'We've got to do something about what's going on at St Pat's. Father Pell said, 'Yes, what do you mean?' I said, 'Brother Dowlan is touching little boys'. Father Pell said, 'Don't be so ridiculous', and walked out.

Father Pell didn't ask any questions. He didn't ask, 'What do you mean' or 'How could you say that?' He just dismissed it and walked out. His reaction gave me the impression that he knew about Brother Dowlan but couldn't or wouldn't do anything about it. My two friends never said a word while I was talking with Father Pell although they did nod agreement. I believe they were aware of similar things happening at St Alipius with Brother Best.

One of these friends later committed suicide by blowing himself up in his car overlooking St Alipius. I only found this out when I went back to Ballarat for work.

I didn't do anything more after I spoke to Father Pell, which is really unfortunate, and I felt a bit guilty about it. People say I was a 12 year-old boy then and I couldn't have done much more anyway. I probably could have, although it would have been at the risk of exposing my own abuse and I couldn't do that, I was too embarrassed, humiliated, ashamed by it, to talk about it.

I don't remember why I told Father Pell about Brother Dowlan. I still don't know where I got the courage to say it, because my biggest fear was exposing myself.

There was this boy who was one year younger than me from St Joseph's Home, an orphanage run by the Sisters of Nazareth. It was always referred to as Nazareth House and it was in Sebastopol, south of Ballarat. I used put him on the handle bars of my bike and ride him to the bus stop. For some reason, I really liked this kid, I didn't even know his name but I was really scared that he was going to be abused. I recognised that he was vulnerable and the type of boy who would be targeted by someone like Dowlan. Maybe this was why I went and told Father Pell.

At the end of 1974 Brother Dowlan told us that he was going to be our under 14 football coach the following year.
When we came to school at the start of 1975, Dowlan was gone. A different Brother coached us that year. No one told us why Brother Dowlan had left or where he had gone. The school headmaster Brother Nangle also left around that time. While I was at St Patrick's there was a rumour that all Form 1C went to see Brother Nangle and put in a complaint against Brother Dowlan, and then they were all in detention. I don't know whether that happened or not, but I think if Brother Nangle didn't know what was going on with Dowlan, there was something wrong.

Brother O'Halloran became the acting headmaster after Brother Nangle left.

In 1975 I was having an argument with my mother when I said in anger Dowlan was touching boys. I never told her I was a victim but I did tell her that he had been touching other boys at St Pat's. My mum didn't believe Dowlan would do such a thing because he was a Christian Brother. She told me never to say those things again. Years later my mum saw Brother Dowlan's conviction on the news. She rang me and apologised.

I didn't tell anyone else about my abuse by Brother Dowlan until I was around 40 years old. I spoke with an employee of mine who I befriended. He had a girlfriend who had been raped and he knew the symptoms. He asked me what was wrong and I ended up telling him I was abused, but I never mentioned Dowlan. I didn't tell anyone else. In fact, I denied the abuse if asked until I reported the matter to the police in April 2014.

About 2002 I read an article which said that Archbishop Pell had denied something. I can't remember what he denied, but I remember thinking, you just can't keep denying it. I went straight to the journalist, Peter Ellingsen at The Age newspaper, and told him about my conversation with Father Pell.

I also told Mr Ellingsen some personal stuff about how I felt and how I'd lived my life, although I didn't tell him what had happened to me. I told him about my friend who had committed suicide and that I believed it was because he had been sexually abused.

After this article was published, Archbishop Pell is quoted as saying:
At a distance of 28 years, I have no recollection of any such conversation. If I was approached and thought the stories plausible, I would have informed the Christian Brothers.

Essentially, Pell denied that I had told him about Dowlan and denied any knowledge of sexual abuse in Ballarat.

In July 2011 Broken Rites contacted me and asked if I was the boy that spoke to the journalist, Mr Ellingsen. I said 'yes'. In 2013 Broken Rites contacted me again and asked if I could give my details to another journalist, David Marr. David Marr interviewed me and included my story in his article for the Quarterly Essay. The article was titled, 'The Prince: Faith, Abuse and George Pell'. Mr Marr asked me if I would be prepared to have my name in the article. I felt I could trust Marr and decided to put my name to it to add credibility.

After this article was published, Archbishop Pell again denied that I had told him about Brother Dowlan. Pell stated, 'A predictable and selective rehash of old material. GK Chesterton said: A good novel tells us the truth about its hero; a bad novel tells us the truth about its author. Marr has no idea what motivates a believing Christian'.

One of the police investigating the original complaints against Dowlan was Paul Jolly. He was a student at St Pat's with me in the 1970s and I played football with him, so I've known Paul for a while. I think he always suspected I was a victim but, when he asked me, I absolutely denied it. He later told me of the police investigation into sexual abuse in Ballarat and the possible link to many suicides.

In February 2014 I approached Victoria Police and reported the abuse by Dowlan. I provided a signed statement and told the police I was willing to give evidence in court against Dowlan. The matter became part of Task Force SANO and Dowlan was charged with his abuse of me. There were numerous victims who had proceeded against Dowlan and he was facing a large number of charges. I know there was some plea bargaining in relation to Dowlan.
pleading guilty to some charges if others were charged.

Ultimately, Dowlan pleaded guilty to my charges and I was not required to give evidence. I provided a victim impact statement but I was still uncomfortable about being identified as an abuse victim. I was still feeling humiliated, embarrassed and guilty. My statement was read out by the prosecutor at the sentence hearing. I found the police to be very good, they were sympathetic and sensitive and they believed my story.

I am very glad I attended the sentence hearing. Listening to the other 15 or so victim impact statements helped give me some self-respect. For the first time in my life I knew that I wasn't alone. I recognised that I was not being over-sensitive or exaggerating.

I was very disappointed with the sentence Dowlan received for his abuse. Three years in prison for abusing 20 boys and for all of the trauma that he caused not just to the victims but to their families as well was totally inadequate. Outside the court I spoke with the media and publicly acknowledged myself as a victim and publicly made my claims about telling George Pell. I wrote to the DPP asking that the sentence be reviewed and, if deemed appropriate, an appeal against leniency be lodged.

When I was at St Patrick's I was one of the more intelligent students in the class. I certainly didn't utilise this intelligence because I started to become progressively withdrawn from everything when I was about 15 years old. I did not concentrate on my schooling or care about learning. I was school captain at Villa Maria, if not in name, certainly by the expectation of being a leader. The abuse caused me to withdraw into myself.

I have attempted suicide on a few occasions but I'm not sure whether they were serious attempts or if I was attention seeking, or if it was a cry for help. I drank bleach once. Even when I was at St Patrick's I started self-abusing and I started cutting my arms. I don't know why I did that, it was out of character and I only did it a couple of times.

Guilt and humiliation have always been my overriding emotions. Knowing about all the abuse that took place in Ballarat makes me feel totally ashamed and abjectly guilty.
I have tried to cope with this all my life, but by the time I reached 40 it was beginning to consume me. I felt guilty about not doing more than what I did. I have heard through the media and police that there could be as many as 40 to 50 suicides in Ballarat alone that were related to child sexual abuse.

I was Catholic and I think the Catholic Church is founded on guilt, so it's probably the biggest thing for me. If something happens to you, you are guilty because of what happened to you. You are guilty because you were complicit in it, even though you had no control over it.

I don't have any male friends. I get hyper-vigilant when males are around and I'm not good with relationships. As a personal trainer, I train young guys, but I would not go out and socialise with them. When I used to go to a gym I stood in the back corner and used to look around for potential threats. After about an hour of watching and realising there were no threats there, I could move on the gym floor. I don't feel comfortable about working in a male environment in the gym. I use work to socialise and escape. If I don't, I wouldn't speak to anyone.

I rarely go out. I can't go outside. I don't do any of the typical masculine things. It's almost as if I have taken every male trait in my life and gotten rid of it. I don't talk about cars, I don't talk about sport. If I had to go to the supermarket I used to take my daughter with me, and she was only 7 or 8 years old then. She was a bit of security for me. She could tell when I was going to have a panic attack and she would get me back to the house.

If someone else take me out to a place I'm unfamiliar with, I can't cope and I can't talk to people. I don't like new situations or meeting new people. The abuse has affected my relationship with my ex-wife and my kids. I became so withdrawn I couldn't do anything. I can't go outside, I can't socialise with people.

Alcohol is a big part of my life. I drink to escape but I know that it doesn't control my life. I deliberately stayed away from drugs because I knew I could become very easily addicted.

I class myself as a victim. I can't get my head around not being a victim, even though psychologists or
psychiatrists that I've spoken to say that I'm a survivor, but I didn't survive what happened.

Five or six years ago I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. I cry over anything, whether it be a happy or sad occasion. I will even cry if someone is randomly nice to me. I cry pretty much every day and the scar of what happened to me just stays there.

Previously, I was not interested in seeking compensation. I don't believe it would help me. I used to think professional help rather than monetary compensation would be more beneficial. I have seen a few psychologists and psychiatrists over the course of the years. It hasn't worked for me to far. I have not seemed to find anyone that I could relate to.

But I have changed my opinion on compensation. After being at the court matter for Dowlan and hearing the stories of the other victims, I am aware that we are all having to endure hardships and the fallout from the abuse. At least compensation could help provide victims with the things in life that they have missed out on by not being able to follow their dreams and career goals. I also think it may encourage others to come forward and seek help.

I am happy that there is research being conducted into the long-term effects of male childhood sexual abuse. The symptoms victims suffer are finally being recognised as real. For me, those symptoms include fear, helplessness, isolation, self-blame/guilt, shame and humiliation, masculinity issues, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, substance abuse and loss of confidence in my manhood.

The first time I told my mother about the abuse was in 2012 or 2013. I was at home arguing with her. She asked me if I was abused while at school and in anger I said yes. I gave her no details of the abuse but did confirm that I had been a victim. She knew it was Dowlan because of our previous conversations.

I know that she has a lot of guilt about this. Since the article by David Marr, my mother no longer considers herself a Catholic. Previously, she would donate to the church and attend weekly mass. She no longer does either of these things.
I don't often get to Ballarat, but I did go in 2009 or 2010. I ran into a guy I went to school with and who I hadn't seen since I left St Patrick's. He told me he had been abused by Brother Dowlan and that he was one of the first to make a complaint to police which resulted in charges against Dowlan. He spoke as if the abuse happened yesterday.

I started to think, 'That's really, really bad', because I always just believed that it happened to me and it didn't happen to anyone else, but I have now realised that there must be a lot of hurting people out there in their 50s. I made a few phone calls to people I had been to school with and tried to get together as much information as I could. Most of the people I spoke to said they didn't want to do anything about it, they said things like, 'It's a long time ago, don't worry about it'.

I rang the Ballarat Courier and asked, 'Has anyone done any stories on this; I really think there should be some sort of peer group support organisation happening'. I was put through to a journalist. She asked what years I was at St Pat's and she started telling me about how many people she knew who had been abused in those years. Everywhere I went in Ballarat on that trip people were telling me stories about being abused by Christian Brothers. It's still so raw and the impact is still so great.

I believe there is a huge story to be told in Ballarat. There are people who are really hurting here. There are some older men that will be suicidal. What I want from the Royal Commission is for their stories to be told. Ballarat was a town of 60,000 people. There is a lot of people there and a lot of people are involved. I reckon there were probably about 100 kids in my year at St Pat's and around 80 per cent of them were abused in some form or other. I know what happened to me has affected my life and I have underachieved my whole life. It will affect generations of people like that.

There has not been a day since 1973 that I haven't thought about what Dowlan did to me. Having the reaction that I had from both Father Pell and mum made me hesitate to come forward sooner as I felt no one would believe me. As I got older I was too embarrassed and ashamed. I have been having counselling over a period of time and I am of
the opinion that, since the Parliamentary Inquiry and the commencement of this Royal Commission, I will be believed."

MS FURNESS: Nothing further, Your Honour.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone else have any questions? Mr Gray, I should tell you that I would anticipate we'll be asked to make findings about some of the matters that Mr Green has included in his statement. It's a matter for you and those instructing you, but I should put you on notice that that's a real possibility.

MR GRAY: Yes, Your Honour. I thank you, Your Honour. My clients have taken the position that I advised yesterday, in the knowledge of the way the Royal Commission --

THE CHAIR: Well, I understand that, but I want to make clear to you that, although we normally don't make findings as to whether or not someone was abused, in relation to the allegation that Mr Green makes in relation to Cardinal Pell, which of course goes to the church's response to allegations, it's in a wholly different category.

MR GRAY: Yes.

THE CHAIR: And I just think it's necessary that you understand and those instructing you understand that I anticipate that we'll be asked to make findings about what he has to say.

MR GRAY: Yes.

THE CHAIR: All I need to say beyond that is, do you still not wish to ask him any questions?

MR GRAY: I don't wish to ask him any questions. As Your Honour knows and the Commission knows, the Cardinal has not been asked to put on a statement in this matter; he undoubtedly will do so if he's asked to.

THE CHAIR: Mr Gray, you can anticipate that he will be asked to.

MR GRAY: Yes, we do anticipate that, Your Honour, and when that happens he will certainly do so.

THE CHAIR: Yes, but that doesn't take away from the point
that I seek to make to you: now is the chance that you have
to ask Mr Green questions if it is to be put to him that
his recollection is not correct.

MR GRAY: Your Honour, we will not be putting to Mr Green
that he is not to be believed, which is the matter
discussed or covered in the practice guideline.

Cardinal Pell, as Mr Green has already noted in his
statement, has a different recollection; Mr Green has
acknowledged that, and that no doubt will be what the
Cardinal says.

THE CHAIR: The position is clear.

MR GRAY: Yes, Your Honour.

THE CHAIR: It's a matter for you and those instructing
you.

MR GRAY: Thank you, Your Honour.

THE CHAIR: Yes, Mr Green, thank you for your evidence.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW

THE CHAIR: I need to tell you, you're excused too.

MS FURNESS: Your Honour, perhaps the luncheon
adjournment.

THE CHAIR: We'll take lunch.

LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT

THE CHAIR: Yes, Ms Furness.

MS FURNESS: Thank you, Your Honour. I call [BAB].

[BAB], affirmed: [2.20pm]

<EXAMINATION BY MS FURNESS:

MS FURNESS: Q. You're known by the pseudonym [BAB] for
the purposes of the Royal Commission?
A. That's correct.
Q. You made a statement dated 12 May?
A. I did.

Q. You have that with you?
A. I do.

Q. Are the contents of that statement true and correct?
A. They are.

EXHIBIT #28-14 STATEMENT OF [BAB] DATED 12/05/2015

Q. I invite you to read your statement, sir.
A. Thank you.

“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.

I was born in 1964. I am currently 50 years old.

I come from a large Catholic family in Ballarat East. I was one of eight children. When I was growing up, Ballarat East felt like it was its own community within Ballarat. There were a number of prominent Catholic families in Ballarat East and my family was one of them.

Generally these prominent families took up the first five or so pews in the St Alipius Church, East Ballarat, and our family had its own unofficial pew. My parents were both quite active within the children community. Ever since I was a young kid, we often had Christian Brothers and parish priests come to our place on Sundays for lunch.

I started school at St Alipius kindergarten in Ballarat East. This was a co-ed school run by the nuns. I stayed there until I was in Grade 2.

In 1973, when I was in Grade 3, I moved to St Alipius Primary School in Ballarat East which was an all boys' school run by the Christian Brothers. I was 8 years old. My Grade 3 teacher was Brother Gerald Leo Fitzgerald.

Brother Fitzgerald was a very strict teacher who often used violence to punish kids who didn't obey the rules. We were a fearful class.
It was not unusual for Brother Fitzgerald to choose kids from the class to sit up the front or down the back. I saw boys in my class sitting on Brother Fitzgerald's knee and I saw him fondling and kissing them. I think many of the boys in the class would have seen this.

At first, Brother Fitzgerald seemed to randomly choose boys to come up the front. After a while, I noticed that Brother Fitzgerald picked favourites. By this, I mean he used to choose the same boy to sit frequently on his lap over a few weeks. After this, he chose another favourite and the pattern seemed to continue.

Brother Fitzgerald often asked the kids he chose to sit on his knee to stay in the classroom with him at play time. My classmates and I sometimes spoke about the fact that a kid had been asked to stay behind but we never discussed what this might have meant.

In about autumn 1973, Brother Fitzgerald picked me to go and sit on his knee during class. When play time came around and all the other kids were moving out, he said to me, 'Can you stay? Would you like to come to the boiler room and see the elephant bones?' There was a rumour in the class that Brother Fitzgerald had these fantastic elephant bones in the boiler room; we all wanted to see them.

The boiler room at St Alipius was like a cellar, it was down a flight of stone steps off to one side of the classrooms. It had a padlocked steel gate on it. The room was very, very small and cramped. It was also very dark. There was just one light on the wall. There were boilers in there to keep the heating going.

When we got into the boiler room I started looking around for the elephant bones. Brother Fitzgerald was pressed up behind me. He then told me that I needed to 'air' myself. This is something Brother Fitzgerald would make the whole class do four or five times a week. It meant taking our pants off and standing there in our underwear.

When Brother Fitzgerald told me I had to air myself, I took my pants down as this is what I had been conditioned to do. I then felt Brother Fitzgerald put one hand on the
back of my head and push me forward. He slipped down my
underwear. I felt something enter my anus three times. I
don't know whether it was finger or his penis. He then
told me to stand up and pull my pants up again.

Immediately after that, Brother Fitzgerald told me
that I was never allowed to say anything about what had
happened. At that time, I also felt that it was not in my
own interests to actually tell anyone about the abuse.

I had already seen Brother Fitzgerald lose his temper
a few times in class with students. If students did not
obey the rules he had set down, he generally responded with
violence. Mostly, we either got the 'gat', which was a
steel rod wrapped in leather, a fist to the side of the
head, or an open slap across the face. I thought this
would happen to me if I told anyone about what had
happened.

I also began to feel quite a lot of shame build up
over the weeks that followed. It wasn't something that I
wanted anybody else to actually know about.

After the incident in the boiler room, things went
sort of back to normal in the classroom. About four days
later, while our class was doing work, Brother Fitzgerald
called me to come and sit on his knee. I refused. I said,
'no'.

After that, I started to get physical abuse from
Brother Fitzgerald. It seemed to me that at any
opportunity, for any sort of infraction, Brother Fitzgerald
would take me to the front of class and give me the strap
for no particular reason.

For instance, one time we had a maths test. Because
maths was not my strong point, I got 9 out of 10 wrong. I
was taken up the front and Brother Fitzgerald stood behind
me. I was made to call out the answers I put for each of
the sums and, for every wrong answer, he punched the side
of my face.

Another time during winter, Brother Fitzgerald asked
us to write something one morning and a couple of the kids
complained about having cold, cramped hands.
Brother Fitzgerald asked who had cold hands and, of course,
I put my hand up having just ridden my bike to school. I
was the only one that was taken up the front and given '12 of the best' across the hand to warm it up. This meant 12 straps across the open palm of my hand. There were lots of similar incidents.

At this time, Brother Fitzgerald was picking on four or five other boys in the class in the same way. Like me, they were physically punished frequently for no particular reason.

The assaults gradually lessened after time, and towards the end of the year I was ignored by Brother Fitzgerald. But when those assaults were happening to me, I knew why. I was able to make the connection between the punishments and me saying 'no' to going up and sitting on his knee, and potentially being taken down into the boiler room again.

After Brother Fitzgerald abused me he turned up at our house another four or five times. He used to ride his bike out. Sometimes he had a drink with my father, other times he had lunch with my family.

I felt intimidated by the fact that Brother Fitzgerald could turn up at my home. I felt as though, even when I was away from school, he still had me in his grasp. He could still turn up and intimidate me in my own home.

I also became aware that there were other boys who were being asked during class to stay in the classroom with Brother Fitzgerald at play time. During play time I could see into the classroom. I could see that boys were being kept in by one or more Brothers. Based on my own experience, I assumed these boys were not saying 'no', because it was always the same boys who were chosen. I suspected that those boys were being sexually abused.

Two boys in particular, who seemed vulnerable, were frequently asked to stay back in the classroom. I noticed they seemed to be having a difficult time of it through the year. I have struggled for a long time with the idea that at the time, although it sounds callous and heartless, I felt that it was much better it happen to them than me.

When I was in about Grade 5, I noticed that some kids in other classes were also staying back in the classrooms at play time with certain Brothers. As I was going to the
playground, I sometimes saw boys sitting on the knees of Brothers or being spoken to by Brothers.

Because of this, I became consciously aware that it was going on to, not only kids in the grades below me, but kids in my grade and kids in the next grade up.

For the rest of my time at St Alipius I was never once assaulted or approached or molested in any way. I began to think that I was not getting picked on by other Brothers because I had said 'no' in Grade 3.

About three months after the event in the boiler room we had a visiting priest come to St Alipius to hear confession. I don't recall this priest's name, but I thought this would be my opportunity to actually talk about this and to say what had happened.

During the confession the priest asked me, 'and what are your sins?' The first thing I said was, 'Well, Brother Fitzgerald has done things to me'. I remember, there was silence for about 30 seconds and then the priest said, 'That didn't happen'. When he said that, I realised that was going to be the position and there was no point in me telling anyone else. I felt disappointed and sad that nothing was going to happen about it, and that those other boys would still be taken out by Brother Fitzgerald.

From Grade 3 until Grade 6 I was an altar boy, as were most of the boys at my school. As an altar boy I helped the parish priest and visiting priests at St Alipius Catholic Church. I was often an altar boy to Father George Pell who was our parish priest at the time. Father Pell also came around to our family home quite a lot over the next few years. There were many, many opportunities for me to tell Father Pell what Brother Fitzgerald had done to me, but I never did. I can't explain why.

I stopped being an altar boy when I left St Alipius in Grade 6. I went to St Patrick's College in Ballarat from Form 1 until Form 4. St Patrick's was also run by the Christian Brothers. After Form 4 I told my parents that I wasn't going back to St Patrick's. I went to a non-Catholic School instead.

I did this because I could see the hypocrisy in the Catholic Church, even though I did not have the words to
describe it that way at the time. It was obvious to me that to preach one thing and to do another and expect people to take that was not good.

I never reported this matter to the police. After I became aware that Brother Fitzgerald was deceased, I really didn't see that there would be any point.

I did not tell my parents about the abuse at the time because they were such an integral part of the Catholic community. We were a time-honoured Catholic Ballarat East family. I didn't want to shake my parents' faith and I didn't want to devastate them. I didn't want them to know that they had put me in a position where this sort of thing could happen, even though I know now that they had no role in that.

My father has since passed away but I still haven't told my mother, mainly because I think there is still that element of being a victim and that shameful aspect that goes along with it. She is elderly, and I would not want to shake her faith. I think that, once my mother has passed away, I will have conversations with my siblings.

It took me another 30 years after I told the priest in the confessional to be able to tell anyone else about the abuse. After I had been married for about 10 years my wife realised I was having an issue and she asked me, 'Why have you got this trouble?' I just sort of blurted out to her what had happened. My wife was quite shocked when I told her. After we talked about it, however, she could understand the reasons I had not told anyone earlier. We have kept it a secret from our families ever since.

About three years ago my wife could see that the abuse I experienced as a child was starting to affect our relationship. She persuaded me to seek counselling, which I did for the first time. I started getting counselling at the Centre Against Sexual Assault, CASA, in Ballarat. CASA later referred me to a psychologist in Ballarat who I now see.

I think that my actions of holding on to this internally have actually led to a psychological barrier, which now means that my marriage is almost collapsing. I think it's become more debilitating the longer it's gone on. I have withdrawn more and it is to a point where it is
really affecting my relationship with my wife.

A few years ago, a counsellor at CASA told me that the Catholic Church had a process in place for victims to seek compensation called Towards Healing. I had not heard about this process before. At the time, however, I decided not to go through this process or seek compensation.

Looking back, I think there must have been a lot of adults in Ballarat East who knew what was going on at St Alipius for a long time. I believe this because it affected so many kids and I think so many kids must have seen what was happening. I do not understand why it was allowed to continue for as long as it did.

I would like the Catholic Church to officially recognise the child sexual abuse and officially apologise for it. There are a lot of people who are hurting and who deserve an apology.

I would also like Cardinal George Pell to publicly acknowledge that child sexual abuse was committed by clergy and Brothers under his watch as the parish priest in Ballarat East. I would like him to apologise for this.

MS FURNESS: No questions, Your Honour.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone else have any questions? No. Thank you Mr [BAB], thank you for your statement and you are now excused.

<THE WITNESS WITHDREW>

MS FURNESS: I call David Ridsdale.

<DAVID JAMES RIDSDALE, affirmed: [2.17pm]

<EXAMINATION BY MS FURNESS:

MS FURNESS: Q. Tell the Royal Commission your full name?
A. My full name is David James Ridsdale.

Q. Mr Ridsdale, you made a statement dated 15 May?
A. That's correct.

Q. Are the contents of that true and correct?
A. That's correct.

MS FURNESS: I tender that statement.

EXHIBIT #28-15 STATEMENT OF DAVID JAMES RIDSDALE DATED
15/05/2015

A. "My name is David Ridsdale. I was born in 1966. I am
currently 48 years of age.

I grew up one of nine children in a large Catholic
family in Ballarat. As others have expressed, my family
was a key member of the community. Both my parents are
from large families and there are around 50 grandchildren
on my father's side of the family.

The religion of my parents was an all invasive force
in our lives, with every aspect centered on the Catholic
community. My mother was secretary of St Alipius Parish
School and was involved in the school for over 50 years.
My parents remain committed members of St Alipius Parish.
My grandparents lived opposite the Redan Church and my
grandmother was like a mother to all the priests who
resided there.

As a young child, I enjoyed the liturgy and believed
what the church taught. The church taught me that priests
were something more than human with a direct link to God.
They were incapable of sin. In my experience, the church
had narrow parameters of sexuality and gender and to fall
outside those boundaries was a sin. The church dictated
the boundaries of right and wrong, and the congregation's
relationship to the clergy was one of submission rather
than supplication.

My uncle, my father's oldest brother, is Gerald
Ridsdale. He was a Catholic priest in the Diocese of
Ballarat. Gerald was treated like a shining light on my
father's side of the family, particularly by my father's
mother. I believe he represented the pinnacle of her
Catholic achievement.

As a priest, Gerald held - I'd just like to explain,
I'm choosing to call him by his first name due to, that we
share the same last name.

As a priest, Gerald held an almost supernatural level
of power in our family and exerted a great deal of control
over the family. He was treated as being better than his
siblings and took full advantage of his exulted status.
Gerald was charismatic and many were in awe of him.

When Gerald came home to visit my grandmother, she
would be extremely frantic. For example, hours before he
was due to arrive, all of my father's six other siblings
had to get their cars off the driveway, everything had to
be prepared for Gerald to smoothly drive in. My father has
told me that, as a child, they used to call Gerald the
'God-botherer', because he was a pious and horrible brother
who lauded himself over his siblings in a superior fashion.

St Alipius:

In 1971 I started kindergarten at St Alipius Girls'
Primary School which was a co-ed school up to Grade 2.
Gerald was a priest at St Alipius for part of this time. I
remained at St Alipius Girls' Primary School until Grade 2.

In 1974 I went to St Alipius Boys' Primary School for
Grade 3. My Grade 3 teacher was brother Gerald Leo
Fitzgerald. Every Friday at the end of school
brother Fitzgerald lined up our class and we all had to
kiss him goodbye or potentially be strapped. Some kids got
special kisses, meaning he used his tongue. This happened
to me a couple of times and I would see him linger with
other boys.

Sometimes, brother Fitzgerald singled out some of us
to stay after class or come on his weekend bike rides. I
went on a few bike rides with him. We would ride into the
bush and countryside where Fitzgerald would teach us about
the outdoors. He was both grumpy and affectionate, and at
the time his lewd behaviour was not obvious, but with the
benefit of hindsight, I can see the inappropriateness of
his physical closeness.

On one occasion when I was aged 9 or 10 and in Grade 4
or 5 I had to go to the sick bay. Brother Best was there.
He was never my year teacher. He'd move very close to my
body and touch me between my legs. He kept saying, 'What's
wrong with you?' I was scared and began to cry. He then
relented.

As I think back to this period in my life, I recall
other similar incidents. I now realise I have ignored or
excused other incidents in light of Gerald's action upon
me. The Best incident went into the growing pile of 'not
as bad' things that happened to me growing up.

At the end of Grade 5 the St Alipius Primary School
closed and we were reintegrated into the girls' school. I
went to this school for Grade 6 in 1977. I started to
misbehave at this time and my parents put it down to the
re-integration of the school, but this was not the case.

When I was around 9 or 10, Gerald started to hang
around my family home. He gave my family gifts and offered
trips away for our large family, which obviously was rare.
I remember one trip to Apollo Bay where we were invited to
his place. My family had never been to Apollo Bay before
this time.

My mother fell pregnant with my younger sister when I
was aged about 11 and it was a difficult pregnancy. Gerald
began asking to help and offered to take me away for
weekends on the preface of easing the burden. I was a
pious young man and often suspect my mum was earmarking me
for the priesthood. I think Gerald took advantage of this
and used it as a means of getting greater access and time
with me under the guise of preparing me.

Gerald first sexually abused me on one of the school
holidays when I was 11 years old and in Grade 6. We were
in a car on a parishioner's farm near Edenhope where he was
teaching me to drive. He stopped the car, undid my pants
and began to pull my penis out to play with it. My naivety
was so great at that point that I genuinely had no idea
what was happening. I thought he had broken my penis when
this white stuff came out, as my ignorance of my body was
so great.

After this, Gerald took every opportunity to initiate
sexual interaction with me. He mainly abused me during
school holidays or on weekends. Initially it was
masturbation and then kissing and then oral sex. I
remember the first time we were in the bush somewhere and
he tried to make me perform oral sex and I gagged. He used
to get angry if I couldn't perform the way he wanted. He
never fully anally penetrated me, despite trying many
times.
One year, Gerald took me and three other boys to White Cliffs. I now know that three of us were molested by Gerald. One of the boys, who was a friend of mine, eventually told me that he had seen Gerald being over-friendly with me one time. Later, when we were about 17, he told me Gerald had tried to seduce him on that trip. He told me he backed away as he realised what was going on. My cousin was also present with his father. My cousin and I are convinced that his father was suspicious of Gerald and, as such, did not leave his children alone with him. Sadly, my cousin's father died before taking any action.

In 1980, Gerald was sent to Elsternwick in Victoria for a year, supposedly to study. In Elsternwick he lived with other clergy. He used to take me and other boys to stay with him there. There was no effort to conceal us and we would meet the other students in the common room before heading to his room. One time there was myself and another boy sleeping in separate beds. Gerald would move between us from bed to bed in the same room.

On another occasion Gerald was at my grandparents' home with a boy who had been living with him while he was a priest in Mortlake. Gerald told me the boy was living with him while his parents were going through a divorce. I remember that, while we were at my grandparents' house, he stood the boy on the table, was giving him Eskimo kisses and kissing him inappropriately in front of members of the family present. I cannot recall exactly who was there, but it was more than just my immediate family. I remember being disturbed that nobody said anything. I remember, as my parents were driving home from my grandparents' house, someone commented that his behaviour with the boy was weird. Nothing else was ever said.

On another occasion when I was 13 or 14 my younger brother and I were walking out of the house just as Gerald was driving up to the driveway. Gerald pulled me into an embrace and kissed me on the lips in a sexual manner. My younger brother saw Gerald kiss me passionately.

That same brother has told me years later that Gerald tried to kiss him in a similar way but he pushed away and told him to bugger off.

Gerald sexually abused me on a regular basis until 1982, when I was 15. I was abused in a variety of cities.
in Victoria and New South Wales, including Edenhope, Ballarat, Apollo Bay, Inglewood, Mortlake, Elsternwick, St Kilda, White Cliffs, Mildura, Horsham and Wilcannia. I stopped counting after that.

Gerald was not secretive about his love for boys or in having boys around and touching us. He would use his power and prestige as a priest to convince children and adults to trust him.

When Gerald started paying more attention to our family, he began buying gifts for my parents. One I remember was a colour TV. It was the first colour TV we ever owned. Much later, my father said, 'I always wondered why he was so nice to us'. I think one of my parents' biggest issues, looking back, is realising Gerald groomed them to get to me.

St Patrick's:

In 1978 I went to St Pat's College in Ballarat for high school. I stayed there until Year 11. I experienced physical abuse there but not sexual abuse. The school was run by the same Christian Brother order that ran St Alipius. The teaching method was always firm and the fairness depended on the Brother you had to deal with.

I don't know of any kids at St Pat's specifically who were abused there but there were rumours from the boarders about some teachers. One example was a rumour about a music teacher who liked to get his baton and flick it in your penis because he thought it was funny and then ask if you wanted it massaged.

Another Brother at the school once put his hands on either side of my head and got very close and intimate. I now perceive what he was doing was making a pass. At that time I stood on his foot and told him to back off. He asked my name, and when I told him he replied, 'Oh, you are one of those Ridsdales'. At the time I thought it was because my older brother had been a difficult student and I had always followed in his shadow but, looking back, I truly wonder what it meant.

I remember another teacher whose classroom had to be soundproofed due to the noise he made when he would fly into a rage in the class. He was the Form 5 and 6 maths
teacher and a leading Christian Brother in Victoria and Tasmania. I would often see his violence and aggression surface when he was angry. On one occasion in Form 5 he decided I hadn't answered a question correctly and threw my yearly notebook across the room, causing the pages to fall out. I questioned his action because I felt his reaction was uncalled for, and that turned into a huge verbal row. The next day the headmaster called my parents and, although they listened to my side of the story, they said that such a respected mathematician and Christian Brother could not be wrong and, therefore, I was lying. I was given detention. Once again, I was reminded that religious clergy were more important than the rest of us and could get away with anything.

For me, St Patrick's became a painful place to attend because I felt different to the other students.

Disclosing:

It was a long time before I knew I was being sexually abused. I just didn't know at the time. After Gerald abused me, I was left alone with feelings and ideas I did not understand, with no one to talk to. The church was the leader in the social idea that gender and sexuality was a simple binary choice. In my experience, if a male did not present heterosexual traits, he was prone to ridicule and isolation. I felt I was completely alone and unable to tell any adult what was happening, especially as I started to struggle with my own sexuality.

After Gerald started abusing me, my behaviour at home became unruly, I was prone to aggressive emotional tantrums and was extremely sensitive about any perceived transgressions on my part. I don't think my family made the connection as I had always been rather sensitive and different from my brothers. Gerald took advantage of this.

My parents did not know what was happening on those weekends away with Gerald, but looking back, I realise some incidents should have been clues. For instance, on one occasion Gerald dropped me home, he told my parents they should check me for genital lice. He said I must have got it from his bed. I'm a parent now and if it was me back then I would have been asking, what was my son doing in your bed? I know there was no maliciousness on the part of my parents. I am sure, if my parents had any inkling of
what he was truly doing, they would not have been silent. My father has since said that if he had known at the time, it might be him in gaol today.

From the age of 15 I told a close family member on at least five occasions I had been abused by Gerald. By the fifth time I bluntly said, 'Gerald has been molesting me'. Rather than respond to my comment, the family member said, 'I hope one of your sisters will return to the church one day'. It was as if they did not hear what I had said.

Growing up, I was too afraid to talk about what had happened to me. I didn't tell anyone until I was 15. As a teenager, I lived in terror that my growing sexual feelings were indicative that I had a predatory nature like Gerald. The church had done an excellent job of convincing, not only me, but my whole family that sexual devotion was a terrible sin. To like someone of the same sex was a mortal sin and something a good Catholic could not do. I was too terrified to even consider the feelings I was having. My only sexual experience and education had been at the hands of Gerald and I equated my growing inner feelings with his actions. It took many years to relief myself of that disinformation.

My reaction to the church was to lose respect and trust in it. I began to question everything and lost faith in the church. This caused huge problems with my parents as they wanted me to stay in the church and couldn't understand my animosity. I lost faith in all institutions and have held an individual world view since.

The sexual education I received at both school and church was almost non-existent. This left me feeling vulnerable and completely ill-prepared for understanding my sexuality and therefore I had no capacity to understand what Gerald was doing was so wrong.

When I was about 16 or 17 I began telling my peers about the abuse. I had been working with people of my age in youth and social programs at the YMCA and issues of abuse had been raised which triggered memories and a new understanding of what had happened to me. I began to confide in my fellow volunteers and, almost without fail, all of them said that some form of abuse had happened to them. At the time, I had a perception that this was a normal part of society.
I had kept my sanity through my teen years through youth leadership at the YMCA and through that program I had achieved national recognition. To compensate my horrible life, I threw myself into any project, to the point where by the age of 22 I was burnt out. I had been working 80 hours a week and doing full-time school as a psychiatric nurse. I thought I was trying to build a life, but what I was doing was hiding from reality. I left Ballarat for Melbourne and began a wide range of jobs, including music management, fruit picking, et cetera. I returned to nursing initially part-time to pay the bills before working at a private hospital.

It was some time before I realised that sexual abuse was not a part of most people's upbringing. Another response I would receive from adults around me was that anyone who committed such acts should be killed and anyone who was abused as a child was bound to repeat the cycle. This was the type of ignorance within society at the time about such issues.

When I was about 20, I first wrote to Gerald expressing my disgust at what he had done to me. I never kept a copy of that letter and received no reply. The confusion inside me led me to make many mistakes in my late teens, but I was determined not to follow in his path. At one point, I rang a police number but was too scared and hung up the phone.

When I was 21 I wrote another letter to Gerald which I showed my eldest sister before - she sent it actually. I again expressed my rage at how Gerald had manipulated me. I again received no response.

Even though I had begun to tell family members and people around me, there was no strong encouragement to tell authorities or bring it to the attention of others. I was continuously told it was my decision to report it, but also reminded of the damage it may cause my family and the church.

In 1992 or 1993 I began running a support group for Christian Brothers who had been accused of child sexual abuse. I did this for some months. It was before I came out publicly. Gerald was in gaol at this time, so my surname was associated with him. The supervising
psychologist where I worked was fully aware of my circumstances and that, although I shared the same surname as a convicted offender, I was one of his survivors rather than a relative.

In retrospect, I am unsure of the professionality of that event.

Up to that point I had told siblings and friends. One of the main reasons that held me back from telling others was that I didn’t want to hurt my grandmother. Her love and obsession of her son Gerald was undeniable. I loved my grandmother and was terrified that if Gerald's behaviour was made public, it would kill her. The growing distress within me was too great and I needed to act. Not long after going public about my abuse, my grandmother became very ill. She was soon bedridden and then died. I never got the chance to speak with her again.

When I was 25, my former partner and I were expecting our second child. I began having terrible feelings and dreams. My main fear was that I would turn into my uncle. I started feeling I was being abused all over again.

It all became too much and we decided something had to be done as it was negatively impacting my growing family. I did not know what to do. I was terrified of ringing the police, I was terrified to go public. I decided to ring George Pell. And I will only refer to him as George Pell.

I have known George since I was born. He was a family friend. He used to attend church services and activities when he was an assistant parish priest at St Alipius. We continued to see him even when he was headmaster at St Aquinas Teachers' College and school. Pell as an avid swimmer and I would often see him at either Eureka Stockade or YMCA pools. I have called him George from since I was a child. I never recall calling him Father. I chose to phone George that day for one reason: he was the only human being in the church who I believed was still a friend and that I could trust.

At 9am on 2 February 1993 I rang George from my home in Bentleigh. My partner at the time was sitting in the room when I made the call.

I told George I had been abused by Gerald. His first
reaction was, 'Oh, right'. There was no shock. His tone then became terse relatively quickly and I could sense anger in his voice. I started to get a sense he was insinuating things about my story and I felt like I'd done something wrong.

I had been clear to George I was concerned about my grandmother and was seeking a private process that could assist me as the pain and distress was overwhelming. George then began to talk of my growing family and my need to take care of their needs. He mentioned things such as, I may soon have to buy a car or a house for my family. I do remember with clarity the last three lines we spoke together:

Me: 'Excuse me, George, what the fuck are you talking about?' George said, 'I want to know what it will take to keep you quiet'. My response was, 'Fuck you George, and everything you stand for'. I hung up the phone.

As soon as I hung up the phone, I called my eldest sister and told her about my conversation. I also called my second eldest sister and told her about the conversation. I remember saying to both my sisters, 'The bastard just tried to bribe me'.

I have never stated that Pell offered me anything specific or tangible in our conversation, only that his attempts to direct the conversation down a particular path made me extremely suspicious of his motivations and what he was insinuating.

George was the first person in the Catholic Church whom I officially told about my abuse by Gerald.

In 1994, while I was still working at a private psychiatric hospital in Brighton run by the St John of God nuns, I saw George Pell for the first time since our conversation. George came to me and said, 'Oh David, how are you going?' He did not ask if I was all right or if I needed help or if he could do anything to help me. He had plenty of opportunity to call me and help me, but he never did.

In the mid-1990s, I saw George Pell again at a Ballarat forum after Towards Healing was introduced. The forum was supposed to provide an overview of the church's
response to the historical abuse. Pell seemed surprised that the attendees did not believe the church had been unaware of the conduct of its clergy. I called him a liar there, but I was actually the quiet one compared to some of the other individuals present. I recall one man said he wanted to kill Pell and the other attendees had to calm him down. I now understand this same man has committed suicide.

Some days I don't know who I am angrier at, and that never stops - Gerald for being a sick monster, or George for the way he reacted and dealt with the issue. Catholic clergy are meant to be the moral leaders of our society, but after my reactions from George and the Catholic Church, I have zero respect for him and that institution.

After I spoke to my sisters, I was furious at George's response and I decided to call the police. I rang the Bentleigh police station and they said someone would return my call shortly. Half an hour later, the police returned my call and said, 'Are you aware your uncle was to be charged later today?' I said, 'No'. Later that day the police picked me up and took me to the police station for an interview that lasted many hours. I was told the charges to be laid against Gerald were going to be delayed for 24 hours so they could use my statement as well.

The police told me I had to be ultra-specific about every instance of sexual abuse that I included in my statement, so my initial statement contained a fairly small number of charges, because they were the only ones I could remember that day.

Gerald was charged the following day, on 3 February 1993, with indecently assaulting myself and several other boys from Edenhope. I hadn't been aware that Gerald had abused other kids at Edenhope but was not surprised.

As the case drew nearer, the police asked me whether I would agree to drop the charges Gerald refused to plead guilty to. The reasoning for this was that I was told to avoid the need to give evidence at a trial and that Gerald could be sentenced and gaoled as soon as possible so they could release his name to gather more evidence against him. I agreed to drop half the charges against Gerald and, as a result, he was only charged with the more minor offences against me.
Gerald was convicted and sentenced for sexually
assaulting eight boys, including me, on 27 May 1993. He
was sentenced to two years, three months' imprisonment and
he served three months. Initially, I was extremely upset
at the brevity of the sentence and worried it was all going
to be brushed under the carpet. My trust in institutions
and authority was shaken after this.

Throughout the gruelling process the police were very
good. They told me they feared there were many more
victims of Gerald out there. They told me, if I helped
them by going public, they would make sure Gerald never got
out of gaol. They felt that a public face to what had been
happening would encourage others to come forward. The
police said straight up, 'We can't do this without you'.
That was their promise and they have kept it so far.

After the first criminal proceedings against Gerald
ended, I did an interview with The Herald Sun. I expected
a few people to come forward as a result, maybe a dozen.
From feedback I received from the police and the support
group, Broken Rites, up to 200 victims of child sexual
abuse came forward after the article was published. There
were many more victims of Gerald that came forward than I
could have possibly imagined.

In 1995, I did an interview with Who magazine. At
that time I referred to George Pell as a trusted priest.
In April 1997 I told Outrage magazine the trusted priest
was George Pell.

In 2001 I was interviewed for the 60 Minutes
programme. When this program was released there was a
letter in the paper from a man who said he knew I was a
liar. His reasoning was that no human being would dare
swear at a Bishop who holds such high regard in society.
The Bishop he referred to was Pell. I wrote a letter to
this man and told him why I did what I did. He wrote back
to me and said, 'I have been sitting here crying for the
last four hours. I am so sorry'.

In 2012, or maybe even later - anyway, recently - 60
Minutes re-aired this program. I didn't know they were
going to do this as nobody told me. I now know they told
nobody. I only found out about the re-airing after my
family rang me.
Every time I have spoken out there has been some backlash from the church, often from Pell. They would criticise me for inconsistencies with dates which they attributed to me lying, rather than consider the sloppy journalism at fault.

The diocese of - sorry. The reason I say it was sloppy journalists is, every time I said, 'I called the police the day before he was charged', they wanted to know the date, I said, 'I don't know, find out'. The fact they didn't do their job properly is not my concern.

The Diocese of Ballarat paid for seven sessions of counselling for me after the criminal proceedings. I did not feel that was enough.

I started civil proceedings against the Catholic Church in 1993. I was not offered any more counselling.

Soon after commencing proceedings, I was told by my parents that Bishop Mulkearns, who was Bishop at the time, held a meeting with my parents and encouraged them to get me to drop the case. The meeting was held without my knowledge. My parents told me that Bishop Mulkearns refused to acknowledge any inappropriate conduct on the part of Gerald.

The church made me an offer of $10,000 to resolve the proceedings. My lawyers, Williams Winter & Higgs, advised me, if I did not accept the $10,000 offer, I would be dragged through a court case that I would never win 'not in a million years'. They went on to advise me I would end up with a $60,000 to $100,000 bill which would destroy my family and my life forever. At that time, I was a terrified 25-year-old with absolutely no support from anyone. I rejected the offer.

The church made a second offer of $30,000. I begrudgingly accepted this offer after I was made to feel scared and convinced the church's legal status as a non-corporate entity meant they could not be legally challenged.

At no point did the church ever say words to the effect of, 'How can we help?' I think that could have made a big difference in my life.
When my extended family first found out that I was abused by Gerald, some of them called me a liar and said, 'No, none of that really happened'. One of my cousins refused to believe Gerald had ever done such a thing and called me a liar. Other members shrugged off my story and said, 'You know David, he's emotional and sensitive'. Other family members have accused me of being a gold digger or that it was so long in the past I should have moved on by now. I know most of these responses are due to ignorance in understanding abuse and its long term insidious impact.

My grandmother's funeral was one of the last major family events I've been to on my father's side of the family. My family have difficulty talking to me about the abuse, Gerald, or the church's involvement. It's too painful for them to think about as I ask too many questions. I am unable to keep my head buried in the sand.

My mother is still a devout Catholic and cannot understand why none of her children go to church anymore. She thinks it's a failure on her part. My daughter asks me, 'Why does nana go to church? Does she not know how much it hurts you?' I try to explain to my daughter that my parents grew up in a different era, and that my mother genuinely believes that hell is a real place. I have never told my mother that it hurts me, that she still goes to the same church, St Alipius, but it does.

My cousin, who was also abused by Gerald, told me he was told by some family members that, if he ever took money or compensation from the church for the molestation, anything he ever bought with it would remind him of this abuse. One of my aunts still visits Gerald in gaol. She claims she does it in honour of her mother. I don't think my grandmother would agree.

With the church being such an integral part of my family's life, the fallout from revelations against Gerald has permeated every aspect of our family. The lack of understanding of the impact of abuse and the shame of Gerald makes it painful for them to discuss it; this inadvertently making me feel more alone to deal with the damage it has caused me. I have become adept at hiding my pain and creating a strong persona as I don't like letting the bastards win.
My family's involvement in moving Gerald:

At my grandmother's funeral, one of my aunts said to me, 'I'm so glad it's finally out, I've known for long'. I replied, 'Sorry, what?' She said, 'Oh, well, you know in Edenhope when it got too much and we got told about it'. She then told me that she and her husband, who was a policeman at the time, had helped move Gerald quietly out of Edenhope. I reacted harshly towards my aunt as Gerald had been abusing me at that time. My older sister was standing next to me. My aunt was very surprised at my reaction and became upset.

After this interaction I was left standing in the hallway alone being ignored. Everyone was talking to each other about how hard it was on them. I suddenly put my hand up and said, 'Excuse me everyone, I was the one fucking raped'. I don't know if they heard me. I then walked out.

I confronted my uncle who had been a policeman about his involvement in moving Gerald from Edenhope. He categorically denied involvement. Other family members were told I was lying about what my aunt had said at the funeral until my sister reminded them that she was there and had heard it. This same uncle then tried to excuse my aunt by saying she was not mentally well and had had a breakdown and had made up the comment. She was admitted to a clinic for treatment.

I have since found out that when Gerald was moved out of Edenhope the same aunt had a conversation with another aunt about suspicion of Gerald's inappropriate behaviour. From that day onwards, none of their children were allowed to be alone with Gerald. They both appeared to have known at the time about Gerald's behaviour but chose not to warn their siblings and the rest of the family.

There's a small spelling mistake in this next line.

I have been asked when the abuse stopped, but my response is that it has never stopped. What Gerald did was the result of a pathetic man unable to make correct choices. The combative approach from the church and their efforts to paint me as a liar were just as painful to my life as the abuse itself. Discovering that the church
leaders were aware of his abuse of others has shattered my trust in social institutions.

The impact of my abuse has been a complete invasion of every aspect of my life. The upbringing I received in the church ensured my naivety was so great I was unaware of what Gerald was doing to me. My fear of being different and a sinner in the eyes of the church meant I was sure it was me doing something wrong.

My personal sexual journey was completely disrupted and poisoned by the actions of Gerald. My inability to trust anyone enough to tell them was a result of the church dogma and supernatural regard of its leaders. When I told my father this, he agreed and said that sadly I was probably correct and at the time no one would have believed me.

It is hard to contemplate the dark space I was in during my teenage years. It's actually really difficult to even remember that disturbing time. I lived in terror of turning into Gerald, and the continuing conflict inside of me ensured that relationships were difficult to maintain. Trust of others was non-existent.

That's sort of been changed. The worst part after the trials was meeting other victims of Gerald at an event organised by Broken Rites. Name tags were provided, and of course I'm the only one to share his name, making it difficult to interact because I would be judged on my last name. But many of us were able to start putting our stories together and we quickly realised that on the same day Gerald would abuse one of us in the morning, another in the afternoon and a third in the evening. The reason we knew was because, public holidays when we met.

I have spoken to a couple of victims about the games he'd play, how he'd say, 'You're my special one'. One boy told me he was jealous of me and in turn I felt dumped when another boy came along. I could not even contemplate this perversity back then.

I now suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and a number of ongoing interpersonal problems. I am not receiving any support at the moment, but last year I did a PTSD support program in England, where I now reside, at my own expense. It was extremely good, but it too opened up a
lot of wounds. The goal isn't suppression, it's management. I need further and ongoing PTSD support.

I have become very good at fronting the world with a strong persona, but you only have to ask those close to me how much this affects me. I am very cautious and selective of who I let in my inner world. I am lucky, I have people I can share the pain with no judgment.

When I tried to get help from the Catholic Church my calls for help were ignored. I got the impression, the church was more concerned with protecting their institutional structure than actually listening to me.

I was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement when I received money from the church. This made me feel the church was offering to buy my silence. I decided to tell the truth no matter what. I have lost a great deal every time I have gone public, but I know my actions in 1993 and beyond have helped in a small way to lead to this Royal Commission and, for that, I am extremely grateful."

MS FURNESS: Nothing, Your Honour.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone else have any questions?

Mr Gray, I need to say the same to you about the allegations in relation to Cardinal Pell as I said to you before lunch. Do you understand?

MR GRAY: Yes, Your Honour. I thank you for that reminder. Our position, as I said, is that I explained yesterday that the stance my clients were taking to this hearing would be that in general we would not question witnesses whose task is difficult enough as it is.

In the case of the telephone conversation about which Mr Ridsdale has given evidence, the Commission is aware that the Cardinal has publicly and repeatedly said that his recollection of that conversation is quite different. If and when the Commission asks the Cardinal to provide a statement, which we assume will happen, I expect that he will say the same thing.

THE CHAIR: Two things about that: yes, we will ask, but as you appreciate, you could have the Cardinal make a statement yourselves. That's a matter for you, but he will
be asked. But there should be no misunderstanding, merely because of the stance which the church has otherwise taken, when it comes to issues of the church's response or individuals from the church's response to abuse, they are factual matters that we must investigate and determine.

MR GRAY: We understand that, Your Honour, and we will approach it in the way that I have mentioned.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Yes.

THE WITNESS: Can I make a comment on that? Is that possible?

THE CHAIR: Maybe better not to, I think, Mr Ridsdale.

THE WITNESS: Just of the Commission itself, I wanted to, just actually a positive one on the Commission.

THE CHAIR: I don't want you to traverse the controversy.

THE WITNESS: No, I won't go across into that area. It's actually about the experience of doing this.

THE CHAIR: Yes, that's fine, you can say what you want to say about that.

THE WITNESS: This has been an extraordinary experience from the point of view of, in 1993 and in 2001 there was no support, and as I was one of the first, I bore the brunt of the church's reaction, and so I am extremely pleased to see how far we've come, and hearing the other men's stories has triggered an enormous amount of flashbacks and memories, things like I'd forgotten about being made to sleep with Fitzgerald, I'd forgotten about standing on my parents' roof wanting to jump but being afraid that I'd only hurt myself and get into trouble.

So, I'm so pleased and I hope the Commission can take it further and remember that, there is a lot of young people out there in an extremely dark place in their teen years suffering from being abused and we now know from research that the earlier we get to those people, the less chance they will hurt themselves and those around them.

So, I would hope that some process is put into place where young people are allowed to speak about their dark
thoughts, to come to terms with them, and that somehow the Commission is able to point out to the church that their stance on sexuality and gender is completely out of line with modern research, modern thought, and they are out of step with the rest of the world. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Ridsdale. Thank you for your evidence, you are now formally excused.

<THE WITNESS WITHDREW>

MS FURNESS: Your Honour, I call Helen Watson.

<HELEN MARGARET WATSON, affirmed: [3.05pm]

<EXAMINATION BY MS FURNESS:

THE WITNESS: Before I read my statement out, I've got a request of the Chair. This report is reasonably concise and I might find it a bit emotional, so my son can read, if that's okay?

THE CHAIR: That's fine, that's fine.

THE WITNESS: Right, thank you.

MS FURNESS: Q. Just pour yourself a glass of water, Ms Watson.
A. The reason I'm making this statement today is, I'm pursuing truth and justice for my son Peter.

Q. Perhaps we can start at the beginning. If you just pour yourself some water and settle in. Now, your name?
A. My name is Helen Margaret Watson.

Q. Ms Watson, you made a statement to the Royal Commission on 28 April?
A. I did.

Q. And you've made some minor amendments today which you will read when you read your statement?
A. I will.

Q. Thank you. I invite you to read your statement, and perhaps if you could tell us your son's name?
A. Michael Watson.
Q. Perhaps Michael can take over if you would like, and I'm also happy if both of you find it difficult.
A. I'd read the statement independently, I'd love to, however Michael is very aware that he can step in if need be.

Q. Thank you. The contents of your statement are true and correct?
A. They are.

MS FURNESS: I tender the statement.

EXHIBIT #28-16 STATEMENT OF HELEN MARGARET WATSON DATED 08/04/2015

Q. Please read your statement, Ms Watson.
A. "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.

My full name is Helen Margaret Watson. I was born in 1949. I am currently 66 years of age.

My family:

My family was very committed to the Catholic Church. I was raised to respect God and the church. I was educated in Catholic primary and secondary schools and totally committed to my faith. My family and I lived and breathed Catholic religion.

In 1972 I married Tim Watson. From about 1972 to about 1997 we lived on a farm in the small rural community of Tatyoon with our two sons, Peter and Michael. Our family travelled 40 kilometres to attend mass at the Emaculate Conception Church in Ararat every Sunday. The boys grew up with the values of the Catholic faith and Peter was an altar boy. That was an error. I did have Peter and Michael were altar boys, but Michael was not an altar boy.

My son Peter went to Yalla-Y-Poora Primary School until Grade 6 when he moved to St Mary's Primary School in Ararat. Peter had a happy childhood and enjoyed playing football, cricket and basketball for the local community.
He aspired to be a high achiever in all that he did.

After primary school, Peter went to Marion College which was right near the Ararat presbytery.

In about 1991, when I was volunteering in the canteen at Marion College, for some reason I had to go to the presbytery with a nun, I think her name was Sister Maria, to collect some supplies for the canteen. The presbytery was next to the church which was next to the college. I remember that Father Paul David Ryan answered the door; he was reeking of alcohol. From this point onwards, I will refer to him as Ryan as I hold no respect for that man.

This was the first time I met Ryan. I became aware that he was relieving Father Brendan Davey, who was the permanent parish priest in Ararat at that time.

Sleepover at the presbytery:

In 1991 - no, I can't read this.

MR M WATSON: "In 1991, when Peter was 16, Ryan invited him and some other boys to the presbytery one night. Peter was invited to sleep over because he lived in the country and Ryan had agreed to bring him back home the next day. At the time, I felt honoured and proud that Peter was invited to stay at the presbytery, so I agreed without hesitation.

The Sunday morning after the sleepover, Ryan brought Peter back home. I remember the day well, but not the date. I asked Ryan to come in and have some breakfast. He told me he had to go back and say mass, which blew me away because he reeked of alcohol. After Ryan left, Peter went straight down to his room.

Some time later I was standing at the kitchen sink and I looked out to see Peter in the paddock, probably 500 metres away. He was physically lifting logs that I did not believe any man could lift. He was building a bonfire. I wondered what was going on, so I went up to him to speak to him. Tears were rolling down his face and he just said, 'Go away, mum. Go away, mum'.

THE WITNESS: "So I did. From that day onwards, Peter was different and his behaviour changed. He withdrew into his room and became anti-social. He became very troubled and
started engaging in self-destructive behaviours, such as self-mutilation, drinking alcohol and then using drugs later.

One day at school, Peter kicked down an ornate wooden staircase bannister. Another time, Peter grabbed the bus driver around the throat while the bus driver was driving the bus. This kind of behaviour was really out of character. I didn't know what was wrong at the time, I thought it might just have been adolescence as Peter was the eldest of the two boys.

Remarkably, Peter completed schooling. He struggled, but he was quite an intelligent young lad. After Peter left school, he just became transient. He left home and went to university for a year and he worked part-time at a place called Nuts and Bolts in Altona. But soon he moved from place to place, lost touch with all his lifelong family and friends, and returned home only sporadically. He tried to work, but he was restless and unsettled and found it difficult to maintain employment.

Peter discloses the abuse:

One day in 1996, when Peter was 21, Peter and I were driving from Tullamarine airport to the farm. During this trip Peter told me that he had been sexually abused by a priest. He didn't say who the priest was at that time. Then he told me, if I told anyone about this, he would kill himself.

I did not raise the subject again while we drove home. Afterwards, I was torn between wanting to breach Peter's trust in me by confronting the church about the sexual abuse, and not wanting Peter to take his life.

That night my husband and I found Peter in bed with a loaded shotgun. This was Peter's first suicide attempt that I knew of. That night we took Peter to a psychiatric ward in Ballarat.

After this, Peter needed frequent intervention from psychiatric services. He started seeing a psychologist in Ballarat, her name Kathleen O'Callaghan, about the abuse.

In 1997 my marriage with Tim broke down. Tim stayed on the farm and I moved to Ararat. Peter lived between my
house and the farm. Peter was still in and out of jobs and in and out of psychiatric hospitals. He was also on marijuana and attempted to take his life on numerous occasions. There was a two week period when Tim drove Peter to counselling sessions with Kathleen O'Callaghan in Ballarat every day. I saw Tim struggle with the knowledge of what had happened to Peter.

MR M WATSON: "During this time I was continually told by Peter's therapists that he had a predisposition to drugs and suffered from drug induced psychosis. However, from living with Peter, I suspected that he had schizophrenia."

THE WITNESS: "Peter eventually told me that Ryan was the priest who had sexually abused him. He told me that when he went to the presbytery with Ryan and five or six other boys, Ryan gave the boys alcohol. They watched blue movies and then all played the card game 'Strip Jack' and ran around naked. Later that evening, the other boys went home, leaving Peter and Ryan alone in the presbytery. Ryan was naked and ran a bath for Peter. He sexually abused Peter - I don't want to talk about that in detail, it's too horrible - and then they slept in the same bed until the following morning.

Father Brendan Davey later told me that Peter used to get off the bus on his way to school and smoke with Ryan at the presbytery. He also said that Peter and other boys used to go to the presbytery at lunchtimes for a smoke with Ryan.

Peter goes missing:

On 18 March 1999 Peter went to the Grampians where he thought about cutting off his penis and throwing himself over a cliff. This was so that he didn't disgrace his parents. He didn't. Instead, he went to his aunt's house and she told me he needed help and that he should go to a psychiatric hospital.

Peter then went and was admitted to the Grampians psychiatric unit in Ballarat. There he was involuntarily committed. The hospital rang me to tell me that he had been committed. They also said that Peter had been diagnosed with schizophrenia and other mental health conditions. When I heard this, I thought, thank God. I had fought for years to get that diagnosis.
Ten or fifteen minutes later the hospital rang me back and said that Peter had absconded. They told me that he had asked to move his car which was parked outside the hospital. He had tried to leave in his car. When it didn't start, he got out and he smashed it up, then he ran away.

Peter did not contact me after this. As a mother, I knew that he had come to some grief because he almost always contacted me when he was at his lowest.

After Peter went missing, in desperation I went to the Ararat presbytery to report the sexual abuse by Ryan and to seek help. I haven't got an idea of the date. I do remember clearly speaking to a nun. I cannot remember her name. I was crying and I was out of control crying. The nun said, 'Well, you know, you are clearly not coping, we'll organise some counselling for you'.

The church organised counselling in Ballarat for me and I went to the St John of God Hospital where I had the counselling. I remember having a counselling session there and I think I went back for another session.

Soon after, the parish priest at that time, Father Brendan Davey, visited me at my home in Ararat. He apologised for the abuse and said that he had no idea that it had happened. He also said that, although there was something different about Ryan, he would not have thought that he was a sex offender. He didn't say what was different about Ryan. Father Davey told me that he was not in the parish when Ryan abused Peter.

Some time later - this was another change. I wasn't quite sure about the date and that was another change. Some time later I called Ballarat police and spoke with a Detective Paul Murnane. It was a pretty short conversation, but I told him my son's name and that he had been sexually abused by Father Paul David Ryan in Ararat Parish when he was a teenager. I told him Peter had gone missing. Detective Murnane said, 'I'll follow it up'. I didn't hear back from Detective Murnane. I never followed it up myself because my life at that time was hell. I had to find Peter. The police were the least of my worries.

After my contact with the church in 1999 I spent the
next six years looking for Peter. I was beside myself and finding my son was my top priority."

MR M WATSON: "I hoped that he would be alive but I sort of knew that he would be dead. It's heartbreaking because I just knew that he had come to grief. I was in survival mode.

During this time the police contacted me from time to time because they had found bodies. I had to go in twice and make a statement and neither of these bodies were Peter.

Peter's body is found:

In December 2005 Senior Detective Constable John Jess from Ballarat police visited me at home to tell me that Peter's body had been identified by a remarkable fingerprint match.

I later learned that on 20 October 1999 a woman had walked past a boat shed in Aspendale, Victoria and smelt something. She got her husband and they looked in the shed and they saw a body hanging in there. The body was naked and painted blue. We didn't know until much later that that body was Peter."

THE WITNESS: "A police officer investigated and concluded that it was death by suicide and that the suicide had happened in about June of that year. The body was decomposed and could not be identified, but a partial fingerprint was taken from a paint tin that was in the shed.

A series of missing person bulletins was published, but only in the Aspendale metropolitan area. The connection with Peter's disappearance wasn't made because bulletins didn't come to Ballarat. Peter's body was not identified and, after a coronial inquest, he was buried as an unknown person in the Melbourne Necropolis.

About six years later, in 2005, the police officer in charge of the initial investigation in Aspendale, Senior Sergeant Rod Owen, was learning how to use new fingerprint identification technology from the United States. He tested the fingerprints of the unknown body with other prints on record and Peter's fingerprints came up as a
match. He told me that he had always been troubled about
the unidentified body in Aspendale. He felt he must have
had a family somewhere.

When the police told me they had found Peter's body, I
was skeptical at first because there had been so many wrong
hits over the years. Once it was confirmed, we had to
fight to have Peter's body exhumed. We couldn't exhume the
body without a death certificate and we had to go to
another coronial inquest to get a death certificate. I
felt we had to fight every step of the way.

Eventually we had Peter's body exhumed and he was
respectfully buried in the community cemetery close to the
family home at Tatyoon.

The Diocese's response:

After Peter's body had been identified I approached
the Ballarat Diocese again. I met with Bishop Peter
Connors on 21 February 2006. During this meeting, I told
him that Ryan had sexually abused Peter. A friend of mine
was with me at this meeting. Bishop Connors responded in a
muffled, monotone voice, 'Not him again'. I asked for a
letter of apology and for the church to cover the costs of
Peter's burial in December 2005. I also told
Bishop Connors that I wanted every bit of information he
had on Ryan. He went over to the filing cabinet and
shuffled around for a bit. He then told me that he did not
have any records on Ryan in his office.

The day after I spoke with Bishop Connors I was
contacted by Colin Ryan, who at that time was a detective
in Warrnambool and he was investigating Ryan in relation to
a complaint of child sexual abuse. Detective Ryan is now
the Mayor of Moyne Shire. I told him about my visit to
Bishop Connors and that he had said there were no
documents.

I understand that Detective Ryan applied for a search
warrant and got documents from the Diocese relating to
Father Ryan. Father Ryan was later convicted of child
sexual abuse offences against other boys.

On 3 March 2006 I met with Bishop Connors again. I
asked for counselling, which Bishop Connors agreed to. I
insisted that I go to a counsellor of my choice and
Bishop Connors agreed. Between March and May 2006 the church paid for me to go to 15 sessions of counselling.

On 20 March 2006 Bishop Connors wrote to me and offered, as matter of pastoral concern, to provide financial assistance to cover the costs of Peter's burial. In this letter, Bishop Connors also acknowledged and apologised for Ryan's abuse of Peter. In June 2006 the church sent me $10,679 to cover Peter's burial expenses and the costs of exhuming Peter's body.

On 7 June 2006 I met with Bishop Connors and asked for compensation from the church for the sexual abuse of Peter and its impact on me. Counselling did not seem to be working and I was desperate to get help for myself.

Bishop Connors told me that he was sorry about my son and that I may never get my faith back, but the church had no money, and I needed to take some responsibility for my own healing. I was shattered. I remember leaving the building in a highly emotional state. I felt as though the church did not care about me, my struggle, nor the sexual abuse of Peter or the loss of my son.

During 2008 and 2009 my counsellor at that time contacted the Diocese and asked them to pay for further counselling sessions for me. The Diocese agreed and approved counselling sessions in batches of 5-15 sessions. In May 2009 I met with Bishop Connors again and he agreed to fund 10 more counselling sessions.

After this, I did not approach the church again until 2013, when Bishop Paul Bird was on board. I first met with Bishop Bird on 3 December 2013. During this meeting I told him that I wanted recognition and compensation for my pain and suffering and counselling. We agreed that I would arrange a further meeting with Bishop Bird to discuss compensation.

On 18 December 2013 I met again with Bishop Bird. He suggested that we try and resolve the issue of compensation through mediation.

Mediation:

On 11 February 2014 I participated in mediation with Bishop Bird and mediator Greg Rooney, he was from South
Australia. We had a morning session where I spoke about how I was feeling. I said that in my opinion the church had minimised everything that had happened and that all they did was offer counselling.

In the afternoon session Bishop Bird said, 'Now, I want you to tell me how we can help you to heal'. And I said at this mediation, 'I want to take six months off work to write a book because it is very therapeutic to record thoughts, feelings and experiences. I definitely need counselling and the way I am feeling now, it might be for 10 years. And, because I struggle with depression and anxiety, maybe some Tai Chi. I believe that would be helpful'. And he said, 'Yes'.

The outcome of the mediation was amazing for me. It was a really good mediation. In earlier meetings with Bishop Bird I felt that he had been defensive and he was totally different in the mediation. He told me that he had never realised the seriousness of the situation or what I had been through.

At the mediation it appeared to me that he had tears rolling down his face. He said, 'I am sorry about all this'. I thought, 'Oh, oh well, that is an apology'. I walked away from the mediation feeling okay, I thought I can now get my life back, I'm going to be okay.

At the end of the mediation, Bishop Bird said, 'I'll get the church's solicitor to contact your lawyer'. I gave Bishop Bird the name of my lawyer. I understood the lawyers would talk about the amounts of compensation we had discussed during the mediation.

I contacted my lawyer Graeme Hills, from Heinz & Partners, about a week after the mediation. He told me he had not been contacted by the Diocese or by their lawyers.

In April or March 2014 my solicitor, Mr Hills, contacted the church's lawyers to advise them of my intention to make a civil claim against the Catholic Church of Ballarat. We hadn't heard from the church's lawyers after the mediation. I felt I had to go down the civil path now because nothing came out of the mediation. I just couldn't walk away.
Over the following months I had three psychiatric assessments. On 4 December 2014 Mr Hills, my barrister Mr Tim Seccull and I met with Patrick Monahan who I understood was the Diocese's lawyer in Melbourne. During the mediation I waited outside the room because I decided not to meet with the Diocese lawyer. I don't know whether that was the right or the wrong thing to do.

The Diocese offered me $40,000 in compensation and said this was because I had already been given about $11,000 - they actually, they had it right down to the very last cent, it wasn't just $11,000, it would have been $11,672.21. It was just so petty, I didn't believe they could be so horrible like that. I had already been given about $11,000 for counselling and for the costs of Peter's burial. My niece who came to the mediation as support person told me not to accept this offer because that amount would not even cover my counselling. This was also agreed to by my two legal reps. There was no settlement at that mediation. My civil claim is still unresolved.

Police investigations:

In 2013 I gave evidence at the Victorian Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations. As a result of this inquiry a police officer was assigned to properly investigate what happened to Peter, including his death. I was very, very happy with this outcome.

This is another difference here. My husband Tim spoke to Detective Senior Constable David Rae from SANO Task Force who was working on our case. As a result, in April 2014, Tim and I both made statements to the police about Peter's abuse by Ryan. However, we know that Ryan can't be prosecuted for his abuse of Peter because Peter is deceased and there is no hard evidence. That's what we've been told by SANO anyhow.

Last year, my son Michael and I went to see Father Brendan Davey. My son asked Father Davey whether he thought Ryan had abused Peter. He paused for a minute and then he said yes. When we asked why, he thought that Father Davey said it was because Detective Murnane had told him. I also went to St John of God Hospital and there was no record of me going to counselling there either.
Impact on my life and my family:

While Peter was alive, I struggled daily supporting him and watching him - no, I can't read this.

MR M WATSON: "While Peter was alive, I struggled daily supporting and watching him struggle with life after the sexual abuse. I watched his life spiral out of control. Peter had been an intelligent, gentle, fun loving and beautiful soul. He was respected by all who knew him. After the abuse, he felt worthless, lacked motivation, had low self-esteem, with bouts of depression.

Peter's tragic journey following the sexual abuse started with escalating anti-social behaviours. Our family became fractured due to Peter's journey of self destruction and my marriage with Tim broke down.

I started gambling and drinking alcohol. I threw myself into my work because I didn't want to think about what happened. Work, gambling and drinking were my coping mechanisms. I have had feelings of tremendous guilt that I couldn't protect my son. Peter was adopted and I have tried to contact his birth mother but I haven't been able to. I feel I have let her down.

I continue to experience a great sense of loss. I have lost my son, my family, my faith, my happiness. I have endured this struggle for the last 20 years because of the sexual abuse of my son by Ryan."

THE WITNESS: "Apart from the tragedy of what happened to my family, the events also had an impact on my faith. I have lost my faith, which was historically a huge part of my life. I have also lost my trust in the Catholic Church because I felt that it protected the offender but did nothing to protect the victims. I still hold that view today.

I feel like I am stuck in this system where the Catholic Church has absolutely total control. What do I do? Do I walk away? I can't walk away because I'm not healed and there has been no justice for Peter.

I retired in October 2014. I had a good working career, but when I retired the reality of life hit me big time. I am now receiving counselling from Amanda.
Commons-Treloar and it is the first time that counselling is actually working and has ever been really successful.

My recommendations:

I believe that Ryan and the Catholic Church destroyed my son. I think that the beliefs of his Catholic education and the church and our family values all instilled in him since childhood prevented him from reporting the abuse. Peter never said anything against Ryan, even after he disclosed the abuse of Ryan to me.

I think survivors and secondary victims of child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy should receive financial compensation and that the amount offered should be determined by legislation so that it is not a decision made wholly by the Catholic Church.

I also think the Catholic Church should finance unlimited access to counselling for all primary and secondary victims.

I would like to see a system where victims of child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy and their families can receive help independent from, but funded by, the Catholic Church. For instance, I think survivors should have some form of a card that enables them to access help, such as counselling and medical services, without having to go to the church for help.

Every week I go to counselling. Afterwards, I have to go to the Diocese office to get reimbursement. It hurts me every time I have to go back to the church. I know I need to get the Catholic Church out of my life, yet they are paying for my counselling. Survivors and their families need independence from the Catholic Church."

MS FURNESS: Your Honours and Commissioner, Ms Watson would just like to make a few more closing statements.

THE WITNESS: Thank you. This is a closing statement by Helen Watson.

"In closing, I would like the record to show that I endorse all the recommendations of the previous witnesses at this Royal Commission in Ballarat."
I would like to thank the Royal Commission for the opportunity to make my statement today.

I make a special thank you to all the compassionate and caring support staff of the Royal Commission.

I have no doubt in my mind that I will take my unresolved trauma and grief caused by the sexual abuse of our Peter by Ryan and the horrendous cover of the church hierarchy to my grave."

Q. Your Honour, just one matter. When Ms Watson completed her statement she referred in two paragraphs, 31 and 63, to an inspector, Detective Inspector Murnane. That statement was provided to him and he's provided a response which has been given to Ms Watson by her solicitors and, as a result, she amended paragraph 31 in the manner she indicated. The original statement had in "1999" and it was amended to some time?
A. Yes, it was the date that I wasn't quite sure, but I would have thought that the LEAP database would have that recorded.

MS FURNESS: I tender an email from the detective setting out his response to those two paragraphs. Copies are available. There will need to be some redactions done before it's made publicly available.

THE CHAIR: This is an email from?
MS FURNESS: Paul Murnane.

EXHIBIT #28-17 - EMAIL FROM PAUL MURNANE

MS FURNESS: Thank you, Your Honour. I have no further questions for the witness.

THE CHAIR: Do we have anything from Detective Ryan? We'll have to talk about that in due course. Does anyone else have any questions of Ms Watson?

I just need to say the same thing, Mr Gray, in relation to Bishop Connors and Bishop Bird.
MR GRAY: Yes, Your Honour, and, as I've said, the approach that my clients have taken is an approach that applies to all witnesses, including those yesterday.

THE CHAIR: It's a matter for your client, but I need to say this to you each time lest there be any misunderstanding in relation to what the Commission may do by way of making findings.

MR GRAY: Yes. I'm just observing, Your Honour, that the same issue did arise a number of times yesterday before Your Honour raised it with me today, and the same approach applies; that is, that my clients have taken the view that they do not wish to add to the distress of the witnesses in this hearing, where it's difficult enough, and where necessary, as in some places it plainly is, the people in question, whether it be Bishop Connors or anyone else, will make their response known.

My clients, Your Honour, as the Commission will be aware, have had these statements from the witnesses only since about late last week.

THE CHAIR: Mr Gray, you've had them for time enough to have sought instructions, but those instructing you should understand that it's not a consideration of relevance to any finding we might make that the church has adopted the stance which it has.

MR GRAY: No, no, I understand that.

THE CHAIR: It's not relevant to the findings which we may be asked to make or indeed make.

MR GRAY: I understand that, Your Honour, but the only observation I would make is that my clients trust in good faith and without any doubt that the Commission would not make findings against anyone, whether it be a church person or anyone else, without giving that person the opportunity to be heard.

THE CHAIR: That's precisely why I'm raising this with you now.

MR GRAY: No, I'm talking about a statement from the person.
THE CHAIR: No, a statement is one thing, but if you want to challenge, or those who instruct you want to challenge what a witness says on a particular issue, that is another thing.

MR GRAY: It is, Your Honour, I'm sorry to be taking the time. The practice guideline requires us to challenge someone where it is to be submitted that that person is not to be believed or has been deliberately untruthful. I do not expect to be making any such submission in relation to any of the witnesses who have given evidence.

THE CHAIR: The consequence which will flow from that, in the most likely event, is the witness will be believed and that will found a finding.

MR GRAY: Well, I don't want to traverse that, Your Honour, but there will be other evidence, one expects, which no doubt the Commission will consider but I don't seek to say any more about it.

THE CHAIR: Well, Mr Gray, I'm sure you understand what I'm saying.

MR GRAY: Yes, Your Honour.

THE CHAIR: I'm sure those instructing you do. There must be no misunderstanding about this, these are significant and serious questions as to the way your client has responded to the allegations. That's what it comes down to and they are issues which we will have to determine having regard to the evidence before us.

But, if the proposition from your client is that all of these witnesses should be believed, you can appreciate that it's likely that it might be said in relation to evidence that you might bring, by others, it might be submitted that they shouldn't be believed.

Now, that's a matter for you and your clients.

MR GRAY: The submission that I have anticipated, Your Honour, is not that they should be believed if their evidence is different from something that one of my - that somebody from one of my clients ultimately says. What I'm observing at the moment is that I do not have instructions at the moment and don't expect to have them to challenge
any of these witnesses on the basis that they are being deliberately untruthful.

THE CHAIR: Well, I've said enough, I think, Mr Gray.

MR GRAY: Yes, Your Honour.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Watson. Sorry to delay you, and thank you for your statement, and your son.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW

THE CHAIR: I need to say that you are excused.

MS FURNESS: Your Honour, I wish to call Peter Blenkiron. I note the time. Would it be possible, perhaps, to extend the sitting day, as long as those who are doing a lot of the hard work will find it manageable, in order to complete his evidence?

THE CHAIR: I'm not mindful of how long his statement is. How long is it?

MS FURNESS: About 14 pages.

THE CHAIR: I think we might take a 10 minute break if we're going to extend, so that those who are working very hard in front of us can have a little bit of respite. Adjourn for 10 minutes.

SHORT ADJOURNMENT

MS FURNESS: Your Honour, the next witness, Mr Blenkiron, has made some handwritten amendments to his statement and if I can just hand those you up to the bench, then we'll make sure others who need them have them.

THE CHAIR: So, is it a replacement statement, is it?

MS FURNESS: It's a replacement statement, Your Honour. Your Honours and Commissioner will see, there are handwritten amendments.

PETER BRIAN BLENKIRON, affirmed: [3.55pm]

EXAMINATION BY MS FURNESS:
MS FURNESS: Q. Would you tell the Royal Commission your full name?
A. Peter Brian Blenkiron.

Q. Mr Blenkiron, you made a statement dated 13 May 2015 as amended today?
A. Yes.

Q. Are the contents of that amended statement true and correct?
A. Yes.

MS FURNESS: I tender that statement.

EXHIBIT #28-18 - STATEMENT OF PETER BRIAN BLENKIRON DATED 13/05/2015

THE WITNESS: There was one part on page 12 which was a different website, that was the only other thing.

Q. Thank you, Mr Blenkiron. I invite you to read your statement, omitting the first two paragraphs.
A. "My full name is Peter Brian Blenkiron. I was born in 1962. I am currently 52 years old. I grew up in Ballarat with two brothers and two sisters.

In 1967, I started primary school at St Aloysius Primary School in Redan. After prep I changed schools and went to St Francis Xavier Primary School in Ballarat East which was run by the Sisters of Mercy.

St Patrick's:

In 1974 I started in Form 1 at St Patrick's College Ballarat. I was 11 years old."

Q. I can help you if you like.
A. I'll be all right, thanks.

"St Patrick's was a Catholic boys' boarding school run by the Christian Brothers. I was a day student there.

My home room teacher in Form 1 was Morrie Holloway. Brother Edward Vernon Dowlan taught me French, maths and singing. I understand that Dowlan now goes by the name of Ted Bales."
Dowlan was a very controlling and strict teacher. He punished students severely when they were disobedient. Dowlan set tasks that were very difficult. He often set copious amounts of homework. When you could not complete the tasks, or if you hadn't finished the homework, he took you to the back of the classroom. Here, he strapped your hands or used a ruler on your knuckles.

Once, when I had been taken to the back of the class, I started crying after the strapping. Dowlan tried to comfort me. This is when the sexual abuse started. He pushed his body against me. I couldn’t move as I had my back hard up against the wall. He touched my penis through my pants. This happened a few times. Each time Dowlan told the other children in the classroom to face the front of the classroom and not turn around. It usually ended with his hands down my pants in the back of the classroom. If there was no sexual abuse after the belting, then you knew that you had a good day. If you just got strapped and punished, then that was okay. Sometimes Dowlan said things to me after he abused me such as, 'This is for your own good'.

Dowlan used to take other kids to the back of the classroom to give them the strap. When he did this, he told the class to face the front and not to turn around. I remember him doing this at least once a week. I never turned around. After it started happening to me, I knew what would happen back there and I didn't want to see it.

One time Dowlan attacked my singing during an audition in an empty classroom. This brought me to tears. Once I was upset, he comforted me by cuddling me. My back was against the wall. He kissed my forehead and cheek and then fondled me. I was crying and felt even more ashamed as it was lunchtime and I could see another student’s head bobbing up and he could look through the sash window in the room where Dowlan and I were. Dowlan said I had potential and, if I did what he said, my singing would improve.

Around 2007 or 2008 a boy from my class told me that he had seen Dowlan abusing me at the back of the classroom.

I spent the rest of the year in 1974 trying to avoid Dowlan. I spent all that time in fear. I had nightmares. I used to go to bed and try to hold my breath so I would not have to wake up any more, so I would die. Death was a
better option than going to school.

In November 1974 I got in trouble with Dowlan again for not having finished my homework. Dowlan told me to meet him after school. He told me to wait at the entrance to the boarding house at St Patrick's College where his room was. The boarding house was located at the back of the school chapel."

Where was I up to?

Q. Paragraph 16?
A. Thanks.

"Dowlan took me into his room, and that is where the worst stuff happened. I don't remember how I got out of his room that day or how I got home. I spent the next few months in a horrible haze. At the beginning of 1975, when I returned to school after the holidays, I was so relieved that Dowlan had been moved on and was no longer teaching at St Patrick's.

Life after school:

After I left school, I did an apprenticeship and became an A-grade electrician. I became an electrical contractor and started my own business when I was 26. I worked hard at my business, which became very successful. I now realise I used work to keep busy and to distract myself from emotional trauma inside. I would keep distressing feelings at bay by working hard. On weekends I drank alcohol and partied with friends. Looking back, I used work and social interactions to fill up my quiet time. When I was still, the feeling of being ill at ease came up and I never let anyone in really close.

Disclosing the abuse:

While I was being abused by Dowlan at St Patrick's College I never told anybody for fear of reprisals by Dowlan and what my peers would say or think.

I first started talking about the abuse in the late 1990s about the time Ridsdale and Best were going through the courts. I had an argument with a friend about child sexual abuse by clergy. He said, 'It didn't happen'. I said, 'It did, it happened to me'.
In the late 1990s I saw an advertisement in the
newspaper asking for information about child sexual abuse.
I rang the telephone number listed. I don't remember who I
spoke to, who placed the advertisement. I told the person
who answered about what had happened to me, but I did not
give my name. I was scared if I spoke up, I would lose
work, as I felt there was a strong Catholic tradition and
influence in Ballarat.

In the early 2000s I was talking to a police officer,
Detective Mick Glenane at the gym and I said to him, 'I had
some stuff happen to me as a kid'. At the time, Detective
Glenane asked whether I wanted to do anything, I just said
'no'. He just said, 'When you're ready mate, come in and
see us'.

In about 2000 my first marriage broke down. Around
this time I started falling apart. I mistakenly thought
that the answer was to keep moving forward and keep busy.
I had been a high functioning perfectionist, always
reaching forward to attain financial security for my
ex-wife and I. The end of my marriage was if my safety had
been taken away, the whole house of cards came down. At
the time I had a tendency to blame my ex-wife, but looking
back, I can see I was an emotional cripple.

I had nightmares that in my job as an electrician I
was being electrocuted and I had caught on fire and my
brain was burning. In my nightmares, I was screaming, but
to no avail. I had a breakdown that I never really
recovered from. I went to a doctor and a psychologist and
was put on anti-depressant medication. I did not tell my
doctor about the abuse, because at that stage I did not
fully understand the link between the abuse and the
difficulties I was having. During this time, I couldn't
understand what I was feeling or why I couldn't get out of
bed. I became unable to even dial telephone numbers. A
quote that would have taken me three-quarters of an hour to
finish, now took me two weeks. I thought I was going mad
and I was unable to work for much of this time.
Eventually, I lost my business and the assets I had built
up.

Towards Healing:

In mid-to-late 2006, I was still suffering from
depression. I found it difficult to return to full-time work.

I remarried in 2010. My new wife asked me if there was something we had overlooked. I had told her about the abuse, but I said I didn't think the abuse was the cause of my problems. My wife suggested I should talk to someone.

I was aware of an organisation called Centacare, which I understood to be a kind of a social welfare association with the Diocese of Ballarat. I thought that I would ring Centacare. I thought, if anyone was going to know about child sexual abuse issues, it would be the Catholic Church, as it had been going on for a while. I also thought, I've got to give the church a chance, so I rang, and Terry Ranger answered the phone. He said, 'It's lucky I answered the phone - I take the contact reports for Towards Healing and I can do your counselling'.

I subsequently met Mr Ranger from Centacare and told my story for the first time. While I was talking, I just rolled into the foetal position and started to dry-retch. Mr Ranger got me a bucket but I pushed him away and managed to hold back the contents of my stomach.

It took about two to three months for my Towards Healing contact report to be finalised. During this time, Mr Ranger offered to be my counsellor. He gave me a sheet of affirmations, which I showed to my wife. She told me I should find someone else, which I did.

I started seeing a different counsellor and the church agreed to pay for five sessions. After those five sessions, I still needed more counselling. I felt that I was just starting to scratch the surface, just starting to move from denial to anger.

After the first set of five sessions, Shane Wall from the Christian Brothers asked me to go - at that stage he was a mediator, anyway - asked me to go to a round-table discussion. He told me that he would be there with a representative of the Christian Brothers, Brian Brandon, and a legal person. He also told me I was welcome to bring a support person or a legal person if I felt that it was necessary. I told him I needed more time. I wasn't ready to meet with him yet. I was angry.
I asked for more counselling and the Christian Brothers agreed to pay for another five sessions. After I had used these, Mr Wall again asked me to go to a round-table discussion with the Christian Brothers. Again, I said I need more time. I was trying to function, but I was battling suicidal thoughts. My son had just been born, and I was worried about how to keep him safe. My feeling is that Mr Wall was trying to push matters to some sort of conclusion or wrap things up.

The Christian Brothers agreed to cover a third round of counselling for me. After this, Mr Wall rang me and told me the Christian Brothers were withdrawing their support and that they would not - I said, what does that mean? He said they would not pay for any more counselling until I sat down at the table with them. I was upset by this and I felt pressured.

After this conversation, I felt I had no option but to go down the legal avenue as described in the Towards Healing handbook they had sent me. I decided to contact a lawyer, so in about 2007 I rang Peter McCracken. I decided to contact him because I had met him before, and I thought I could trust him.

I asked Mr McCracken how much it would cost me to sort out my claim with the church - Christian Brothers. He gave me a cost estimate of between $5,000 and $8,000. I agreed to proceed, which I understand was no longer through the Towards Healing process.

Around three months later Mr McCracken rang me and said he needed to consult a Queens Counsel. He told me the process would now cost between $25,000 and $30,000. This was a lot of money. My wife and I decided that spending up to $30,000 was important as I needed to stand up for myself as an adult, given I couldn't stand up for myself as a child.

In 2007 I was diagnosed with late onset post-traumatic stress disorder caused by the childhood sexual abuse I had suffered at the hands of Dowlan. I was also diagnosed with anxiety and depression, also caused by the abuse.

Legal proceedings were issued in 2007. The legal process dragged on and there were numerous delays. Some time later, Mr McCracken rang me and told me that the bill
was now up to $90,000. I became even more suicidal, because I felt like I had further damaged my family's financial future. If I died, their financial future would be okay because of my life insurance.

Around this time someone gave me John Ellis' number. Mr Ellis is a lawyer based in Sydney. At this time I did not know Mr Ellis had taken the Catholic Church to court.

I rang Mr Ellis and he told me that the best way to get things back on track was to go to mediation. Mr Ellis rang Mr McCracken and told him this as well.

A mediation was arranged in Melbourne and I was represented by Mr McCracken and Jeff Moore QC. Mr Ellis flew down from Sydney to come to the mediation. Mr Ellis sat outside the mediation room for the whole time we were there, as Mr McCracken would not let Mr Ellis come into the room.

While we were preparing for the mediation, Mr Moore QC asked Mr McCracken where the legal costs were up to. Mr McCracken handed him a sheet of paper with a figure on it. I saw the note and the figure was $147,000. I asked them whether that included the costs up to $147,000 and Mr McCracken said 'Yes'.

A week after mediation I went to see Mr McCracken and I asked him what the worst-case scenario would be if we went to a hearing. He told me that it would cost me $300,000 in legal fees to take my matter to court.

I rang Mr Ellis for help. I was worried that Claire and I would have to sell our property, our family home. Mr Ellis asked me to think about a values-based solution. In other words, to work out what I could live with if we were able to make this go away quickly. I talked about it with my wife, and I figured that, since the Christian Brothers were paid to educate me and keep me safe, if they paid for the school fees of my two children and my mammoth legal costs, I could live with that. I figured I would also have to sell some property to reduce my debts and that I would have to pay break-out fees as a result. I asked that the settlement also cover those costs. All of those expenses amounted to $445,000.

Mr Ellis spoke to the Christian Brothers who agreed to
settle for this amount. The Christian Brothers made me this offer through Mr McCracken. Mr McCracken rang me and said, 'You can't take that'. I didn't know what to do. I felt that he was not listening to me when I told him I wanted to settle. Mr McCracken later sent me a bill of $168,000 and told me that he would hold the settlement money until the dispute over costs was resolved.

After this, I decided I did not want McCracken to act for me any more. I rang Mr Ellis and asked him to sort it out. Mr Ellis sent me through the settlement paperwork. I understand he also wrote to Mr McCracken and told him he wasn't to contact me anymore.

I think that part of the reason Mr McCracken's bill was large was because the Christian Brothers took lots of technical defences, including forcing McCracken to re-do the statement of claim twice. The type of defences they took have been described to me as Ellis-type defences, as well as limitation of action defences.

My case against the Christian Brothers resolved for $442,500 in July 2011. This may seem like a lot of money, but by the time I paid my legal bills, made an advance payment for my children's school fees, and re-organised my finances as I was not working, there was no lump sum left over. If I think about my loss of earnings for the past, and stretching into the future, and the terrible impact of the abuse on my life over the long term, the amount of compensation did not address the real impact on my life and on my family's financial position.

Mr Ellis then helped me to resolve my costs dispute with McCracken. I ultimately paid Mr McCracken $117,000 for legal fees.

After settlement I asked for an exit interview with Brother Brian Brandon. Mr Ellis and I met with Brother Brandon in the late 2000s. Brother Brandon told me that the reason the Christian Brothers had pressured me to go to a round-table meeting when I went to Towards Healing, was that they wanted to resolve the matter quickly. Brother Brandon apologised for this and told me the Christian Brothers believed that, if it was resolved quicker, this would speed up recovery. Some years after this, I met with Mr Wall and a few others. During this meeting, Mr Wall explained to a person present that the
Christian Brothers had pressured me to go to the round-table meeting because Catholic Church Insurance was putting pressure on them to resolve matters.

Overall, my experience with Towards Healing was fraught. I found the experience to be intrusive, destructive, and not supportive. I felt that in the Towards Healing process the Christian Brothers withdrew counselling support to pressure me to resolve my claim early and for a low amount. My experience with Mr McCracken and the litigation process was also very stressful and unsatisfactory.

In 2014 I instructed Dr Waller, from Waller Legal, to act on my behalf in relation to my dissatisfaction with the earlier process involving the Christian Brothers. She is helping me to seek further assistance from the Christian Brothers to help me deal with the long term impact of sexual abuse on myself and my family. This matter is ongoing.

Ballarat Survivors Group:

I used to play footy with a guy who had been at St Alipius. This guy was a plumber and he came around to fix my hot water service one day in 2006/2007. I was really struggling at the time and I wasn't working, and he asked me what I was doing at home and not at work. At this time, I had hardly told people close to me about the abuse. I almost sat down and had a cuppa with him to tell him what was going on. I didn't. Later, he committed suicide. I didn't know it, but he was also going through tough times and had fallen apart. I found out that he had testified at the committal hearing for Brother Robert Best. I believe that, if I had sat down and had that cuppa with him, he'd still be alive today.

In about 2008 my counsellor suggested I make a list of people that are closest to me and tell them about the abuse. The first time I told anyone on the list, I spent the next three days in bed. Once I started to tell people, there were days when I felt I had nowhere to go. I felt there was no one else who really got it.

Around this time I made contact with another survivor of child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy in Ballarat, Stephen Woods. I remember that he had talked about his
abuse on 60 Minutes. I contacted him and we caught up. It was good to talk to him. I could tell he understood how I felt. I didn't feel judged.

After this, I started telling everyone that I had been sexually abused at St Patrick's. Gradually people gave me names of other survivors. I contacted the people whose names I had been given and met them for a coffee. I started gathering names of other survivors in Ballarat.

In about 2011 the Children of the Phoenix, an organisation that offers scholarships to survivors of childhood sexual abuse, organised a fundraiser in Ballarat. Detective Senior Sergeant Kevin Carson was on the committee of the organisation and he organised a table at this event. A survivor from St Alipius Primary School and I contacted other survivors and asked them to come along. Six or seven other survivors turned up at this event and joined our table. I had a good night.

After this, I arranged monthly events and invited all the survivors I knew. We normally met in a cafe. We didn't talk about the abuse, but I feel that we started to normalise it - the effects of the abuse. Over time, this group got bigger. One day a survivor came along to one of these events. He was angry. I told him I was struggling too and he apologised and left. I struggled after this and began to think I was putting myself in a dangerous position. I contacted Andrea Lockhart at the Centre Against Sexual Assault, CASA, in Ballarat. I had been to CASA once before and I knew one of the guys who went to the men's group therapy there. I got to know Ms Lockhart over about three months. I wanted to be sure I could trust her. Over time I introduced her to some of the survivors in our group. I held a few barbecues so that we could get to know her. I was aware that it takes time to build trust. This group still meets and we have come to call ourselves the Ballarat Survivors Group. It says that CASA now runs the group.

Before the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations was announced, I became aware that a lot of survivors in Ballarat didn't feel comfortable writing individual submissions to the inquiry. I rang them and I asked if they would like to be part of a group submission. Some agreed, others said they were too unwell to even think
A group of us, with tremendous help from Judy Courtin, put together a group submission which compiled the stories of 12 survivors of child and sexual abuse committed by the Catholic clergy in Ballarat. These were the only survivors who were capable of giving us this information. In total, 44 people signed this submission. If survivors were not comfortable to give their name, we recorded them as a number, therefore allowing everyone to be part of it at some level. As we came across new survivors, we continued to add them to the list. The number is increasing all the time.

On 28 February 2013 I gave evidence at the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry with a number of members of the Ballarat Survivors Group.

Going to the police:

When I started telling people about the abuse, I spoke to a friend of mine who told me that he had been sexually abused as well. He told me that Detective Senior Sergeant Kevin Carson had contacted him in about 2001 and he had found Detective Carson to be helpful and supportive.

In about 2013 I sent my Towards Healing contact report to Detective Senior Sergeant Carson. He said to me, 'When you're ready, come in and we'll do a statement'. In about March 2014 I was contacted by Colleen Connelly from SANO Task Force to make a statement against Dowlan.

Dowlan was eventually charged with my complaint and pleaded guilty. In 2015 I read out a victim impact statement at Dowlan's sentencing hearing, as did a number of other survivors.

Moving Towards Justice Group:

In about 2012, Carmel Moloney contacted me, asked me what she could do to help. She suggested I meet with some people, including Michael Burke and Frank Sheehan. I gradually met with the other members of the group. I understand that this group had grown around a parishioner saying, 'We need to help'. I suggested the group call itself, 'Clergy Related Injury Action Group' (CRAIG). I hoped that the group could call for a redress scheme. I
thought it would be really positive to have a cross-section
of the community calling for a system to stop deaths.

I said I would be the conduit between CRAIG and other
survivors. I used to go to the meetings with CRAIG. One
day I came along to a meeting and discovered the group was
in the process of changing their name. The group became
known as Moving Towards Justice.

I later suggested that Moving Towards Justice could
create survivor packs which would provide assistance for
survivors in need. Such assistance could include helping
with rent or bills, or giving petrol or grocery vouchers to
survivors.

The group obtained some money from the Ballarat
Diocese and the Christian Brothers and started providing
survivor packs. However, over time the group started
asking for the names and addresses of survivors and this
raised issues about confidentiality. Some members of the
group said that the packs were creating dependency and
wanted more information about the survivor before they
agreed to fund them.

After a while, I felt that, although Moving Towards
Justice had good intentions, the process was becoming too
intrusive on survivors' privacy. I suggested that Moving
Towards Justice needed to help the Catholic community to
learn not to turn their backs on their own families and
perhaps that might help the healing. They should
concentrate on the church community.

Assistance from the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat."

Sorry it's taking so long.

THE CHAIR: That's alright.

THE WITNESS: "During the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry,
I had heard that the survivors could go to their Bishop or
provincial leader for help. I also read this on - this is
a change - the Victorian Inquiry website. I took my next
counselling bill into Bishop Bird's office and asked them
to pay it, in light of what's above. They asked me whether
I would like a cheque or cash.

I started holding weekly meetings in a cafe so that
survivors could come and bring me receipts that they had
from expenses, such as counselling, the transport costs of
attending counselling, medication and body pain management.

I took these receipts to the Bishop's office and they
gave me cheques, sometimes cash, to give back to the
survivors.

In early 2013 Ms Lockhart and Shireen Gunn from CASA
and I met with Mark Bromley and Father Justin Driscoll from
the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat, and Mr Wall from the
Christian Brothers.

During this meeting we came up with a process that I
called an 'interim solution', where the Ballarat Diocese
and the Christian Brothers agreed to cover certain expenses
of a survivor, such as counselling on a case-by-case basis.
Under this process a survivor obtains a recommendation
about funding from their general practitioner or counsellor
and sends it to the Diocese. If the Diocese or Christian
Brothers approve this funding, it will cover that expense
for three months. After this, a survivor can re-apply for
assistance for another three months. The three month limit
was not my suggestion.

Concluding remarks and recommendations:

I thought I'd been one of the lucky ones, that the
abuse hadn't affected me. It took 12 years before I fell
apart and broke down. That's not 12 years. I was 38, so -
oh, from 12 to 38, so that should say --


THE WITNESS: Thanks.

"... 36 years before I fell apart and broke down. By
the time I was 38, I progressively lost my business and my
ability to earn a living.

In late 1974 or early 1975, my parents sat me down and
said that they'd heard about Dowlan. I was just so ashamed
of that stuff, I didn't tell them anything. My father died
in 2005. In about 2007 or 2008 I finally gave my mother a
letter which explained what had happened to me. I tried to
soften the blow for her, but she was pretty knocked around.
She had started living next-door to me and she noticed that
I wasn't going to work and was wondering what had happened,
so I told her. With great pain, I handed her the letter.

Up until a few years ago, the battle had been not to give up and take my own life. I am no longer suicidal. That's probably 12, it's 12 years not to give up and take my own life. If you have not had to battle with this, it is pretty hard to understand. It is like a stereo going off in your head, saying, 'You're no good, you're worthless. What's the point?' Sometimes the volume is at 1, other times it is at 5, and other times it is at 10.

The more support you have, the better your counsellor, the more the volume goes down. The more you are alone, isolated and left to listen to those thoughts, the more at risk you are. I was convinced that everybody was better off without me. The impact on my family has been enormous at every level - emotionally, financially and on my relationship with my wife, Claire."

THE CHAIR: Would you like Ms Furness to finish reading the statement for you?
A. No, I'm going to do this. Thanks.

"From my experience, I know that, if you can find any justification to take your life, you'll take it, because you think there's no way out. You don't know any different. To hear from people that have been through it and have recovered is a massive gift, to know that somebody can get through those darkest of darkest times, because it gets worse before it gets better.

I hope that, in telling my story, other people might be assisted, although I am by no means healed. It's not from lack of trying.

I think that the key points are not to be isolated, but to have available professional counselling assistance and community support. I was at my worst when I was alone in my own private hell. I believe I was most at risk of suicide when I was isolated rather than connected and unable to understand what was going on by myself. I hope that, by telling my story, others might reach out for help, even if they are okay for the moment, just on the off-chance it may help to prevent disaster in the future.

Almost done. It can't be a coincidence that the suicide rate in Ballarat is higher than the road toll. That ice, alcohol and other drugs are up there with
domestic violence and are big issues in Ballarat. I think not. And some of those suicides are not primary victims. The abuse has affected the whole community.

In the evening of the first day of these hearings, my son said to me, 'I'm scared you're going to die, dad'. He shouldn't have to say that to me. He's 8 years old.

We need a supportive system to be put in place. Test it here in Ballarat, start it, tweak it, and roll it out. We could start with something similar that's used for post-traumatic stress disorder sufferers, e.g. TPI for returned servicemen.

A supportive system would work at many levels. Our gaols are full of abuse survivors. Three meals a day, a roof over your head and medical help for a cost of $120,000 per annum. People would live, heal and some will never fall apart or never miss living life or a day's work, but maybe some never will.

That's not really clear there, I'm saying that that's what the government spends on somebody who's put in gaol and to redirect the funding.

Then, teach our kids some skills we have learnt from trauma recovery to equip them for life. The principals at St Pat's Senior School and St Alipius have already shown willingness to partner with us survivors in this. That is how you might change a culture and empty our gaols."

Q. Mr Blenkiron, you didn't read the last page which are four paragraphs, but the Royal Commission will most certainly take those into account.
A. I'm sorry. I call that the trapdoor moment, my brain just tips out.

"I feel that there have been many suicides in Ballarat caused by child sexual abuse. My friend's suicide in 2009 was what motivated me to make a vow to myself that there would be no more suicides in Ballarat. I started to work on what solutions we could put in place to keep people alive and stop the suicides, because that's really the bottom line.

Andrea Lockhart wrote a submission to the Royal Commission in June 2014 for me and another survivor. We
recommended that a redress scheme be set up which is
administered by the government to assist in compensating
people for the years of suffering that abuse has caused.
This would include compensation for the impacts of abuse on
family, relationships, children, employment and income
security.

I would not call it a compensation, but the CRI, for
Clergy Related Injury. It should be a supportive system,
like what's offered to returned servicemen with PTSD.

I think that all survivors of child sexual abuse by
clergy fall somewhere on a continuum. Some just want an
acknowledgment that the abuse happened and an apology,
while others are close to suicide. I think funding should
be allocated to each survivor, and the allocation of
funding should depend upon where the survivor falls on the
continuum. This allocation should change if and when the
survivor's needs change. The response should be based on
need. This system should be non-intrusive, supportive and
responsive.

Healing does not take place just for us survivors; it
has to take place in a community as well. Unless we can
put a scheme in place run by the government and paid for by
the responsible church or religious body, then the healing
will not take place. We need positive action. Talk is
cheap, we need more action and no more abuse-related
suicides."

MS FURNESS: Nothing further, Your Honour.

THE CHAIR: Anyone else have any questions? Thank you,
Mr Blenkiron, thank you for your statement. You are now
excused.

<THE WITNESS WITHDREW

MS FURNESS: Your Honour, there's just one additional
matter. My friend, Mr Gray, was referring to the practice
guidelines and the one in particular he was referring to
was 67, and I'll read it:

Except as set out below, the Royal
Commission will not apply the rule in
Browne v Dunn. If the Royal Commission is
to be invited to disbelief a witness, the
material grounds upon which it is said that
the evidence should be disbelieved should
be put to the witness so that the witness
may have an opportunity to offer an
explanation.

There's an additional subparagraph of that guideline,
and that is:

The Royal Commission expects that, where it
is contended that deliberately false
evidence has been given, or that there has
been a mistake on the part of the witness
on a significant issue, the grounds of such
contention will be put.

I raise that, Your Honour, in order that my friend
understands that 67(b) of the guideline may well be
applicable to the matters Your Honour has raised earlier.

THE CHAIR: Yes, well, the position I think is now crystal
clear, or it should be. Very well, 10 o'clock in the
morning.

AT 4.47PM THE COMMISSION WAS ADJOURNED
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