

Peter D Capeland



The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Suite S1 59
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am an inmate who is 45 years old and I was born in Sydney but adopted out in my first month of life to a couple who could not have children. At the time my adopted parents lived and worked in Papua New Guinea and I lived there on and off till I was about 10-11 years old. My adopted parents thought a daughter would be nice too and so adopted a girl who is 11 months younger than I do.

Life in PNG then was idyllic and was different to Australia in the way people used their recreation. You went to clubs like the RSL and Dept of Civil Aviation club etc, and the expats sort of stayed together. My father worked for a firm called John Stubbs & Son and it was the son whom my parents befriended and would take my folks to the clubs and on outings. Young John would take us for drives to places like Sogeri which in Australia would be like going for a drive up to Toowoomba from Brisbane say, for a day. However this lovely lifestyle was broken for me as this "friend" sexually abused me when I was 10. I could not tell anyone out of fear and shame and as my demeanour changed quite dramatically my parents were at a loss as to why I suddenly changed. I rebelled and refused to attend school and as Australia ran PNG then, school was compulsory and so my folks brought me back to Australia to finish my school.

Upon coming to Australia we resided mainly in Cairns and Brisbane. Cairns having some relatives on my Father's side and Brisbane having all my Mum's side. Mum and her brothers and sisters all were born in Brisbane and we have such a tie to Queensland in that my Great Great Uncle is Major Edmund Lockyer and the same gent who the Lockyer Valley in the Darling Downs area is named after. You would notice that I call all these people my relatives as they are. I have never been worried that I was adopted and these folk are my relatives.

Well my attitude didn't change and I went through a series of schools until the then Dept of Children's Services took me from my folks and placed me in an institution called Wilson Youth Hospital. I was there for approximately 8-9 months and then sent to Boys Town for three years. During that period at Wilson I went through a series of medical tests, not told anything and talked to no one. I was heavily medicated and I remember some boys who would get a virtual cocktail of pills three times a day. If punished we would be made to remain in a bare isolated room with minimal clothing and with the air-conditioning turned up. It got to a stage for me that I escaped once with another boy. When news came of my going to another place I can remember being overjoyed. We were even taken to a place to receive a full suitcase of clothes and things.

It was at Boys Town that I endured a more systemic and prolonged number of emotional, physical and sexual assaults. Despite what went on there I did manage to achieve my schooling and ended up being dux of the class for the three years I was there. I think now that I wanted so much to achieve a pass so as not to return. The other aspect of this place was that it was rural based and had a farm environment that I took to readily and achieved a knowledge of farming and dairying, that for a number of years after leaving Boys Town, kept me in work.

Upon leaving in 1974 I returned home to my family in Cairns and applied for an apprenticeship with the local Harbour Board and as a result of my good marks won the apprenticeship and I started work in

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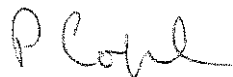
1975 as a Fitter and Turner. This did not last long however as I was having instances where I was being reminded of the assaults and so found alcohol and drugs could help me forget all this and so I readily took to them. This carried on for the next 20 years.

In those twenty years I went through countless jobs, some of, which were great in terms of future dreams, through two relationships, which produced three children whom I have not seen since. Constant ill health, always at loggerheads with my folks, treating them like they were just there to give me money or a bed for the night etc, and of course trouble with the law and authorities.

In 1989 I had started journeying down the coast from Cairns and had some notion of heading to Brisbane. I ended up in Sydney drunk and in Kings Cross on the streets when Police found me and took me to a Salvation Army rehabilitation centre. My first touch of trying to come to grips with my life. I actually did quite well there and to date have never touched my main addictions of pills and heroin. I did meet a girl whilst there and left earlier than they would have liked but I felt I was ready. I took up a relationship with this girl and eventually married her in 1993. She was a recovering alcoholic and addict herself and it should have warned me to maybe go easy but we loved each other and put up with what we felt were minor instances of our using. We ended up having a beautiful daughter in 1994.

However things came to a head in 1995 and I was kicked out of home. The wife would get restraining orders out on me to keep me away while she could drink, so it sort of fell apart and I drifted off in the car for three months and ended up in Adelaide. This is where I have ended up in prison now. The reason I am in prison is through a man who sexually assaulted me whilst I was asleep in bed and through an altercation which ensued this man died as a result of the fight. So I am now serving a Life sentence for the killing of this man. Even though the trial could not come to any other decision other than what I said occurred and that I reacted solely to the prior sensitisation of my childhood it still seemed to matter none that there were extenuating circumstances. I have now tried to come to terms with my life but still have troubles doing so. I constantly end up having instances where I suffer from flashbacks. I suffer from Encopreses as a result of the assault on me from as far back as the earliest assault and I just can't get any real treatment in prison, at least in this State. But I am trying to apply for an Interstate Transfer to return to Queensland where I do have a support network from people I have met and stayed in contact with since I submitted a letter similar to this to the *Queensland Inquiry into the Abuse of Children in Qld Institutions*. I hope that I have spelt out enough of what has happened to me and would like the opportunity to have my voice heard in the Inquiry that the Senate has instigated, not only should the person who assaulted me in Papua New Guinea be outed but more importantly the abuse perpetrated by a supposedly holistic, caring environment that the Church was supposed to give us as children certainly was not forthcoming. Instead only horrors of the reverse was true.

Sincerely,



Peter David Copeland