SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVOR'S HANDBOOK

One man fights the Catholic Church

JOHN SAUNDERS

"John's story can inform and inspire."

FOREWORD BY STEVE BIDDULPH

John Saunders is a father to three children, has travelled the world and been interested in communications and the human condition for many years. After studying Psychotherapy in the early 1990s he set up a communications business in eastern Australia. This delivered indoor and outdoor experiential programmes to corporate teams, helping them enhance their productivity. John designed, ran and opened over one hundred national and international conferences within Australia.

When he became a single parent in the late 1990s he started an advertising business in digital media management and production. This involved the design and creation of advertising for outdoor billboards and cinema.

In 2005 he travelled the world with his daughter and filmed a documentary on positive parenting.

Currently his focus is on assisting others on their healing journey through his writings. He spends his leisure time as a musician.

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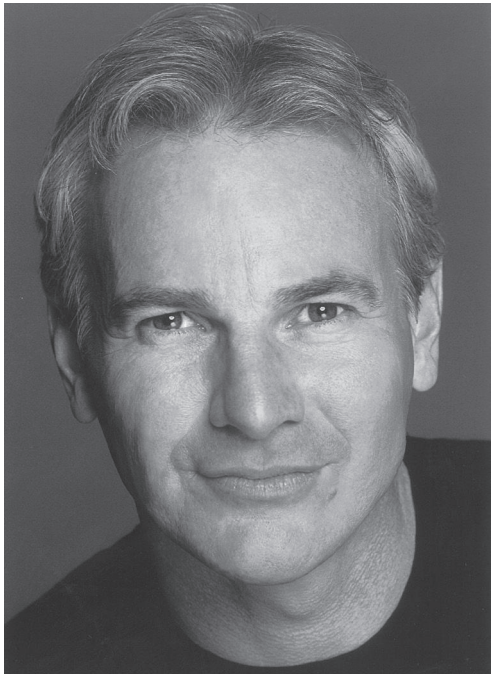

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Introduction

If I was to investigate the lives of all the authors who have written the books that hold pearls of wisdom and touch the hearts and souls of those that read them, I'm sure I would find that their lives had periods of great struggle and suffering. Many may well have written their books during these times.

This book is about my time of struggle, interwoven with my understanding of the direct gifts that I have received from this journey. I'm hoping the two will combine successfully for you and be easy to engage with, and that you will find a piece of you on the pages that follow.

As I wonder what to write to open this book, ironically I think of placing J.M.J. (Jesus, Mary & Joseph) at the top left hand corner of the page, as I had to write at the top of every page as a seven-year-old going to a Christian school. I'm fifty-one now and it has been eighteen years since I first recalled the memory of being sexually abused by a teacher in sixth class at a Church-run boy's school.

It was during a counselling session when I was thirty-three that I first recalled the memory of the abuse. Imagine something coming up behind you while you are peacefully lying down relaxed and startling you to the point where your whole body jumps off the floor. This is what happened to me as the memory of abuse came rushing back. Then my mind immediately began to negate and trivialise the memory.

I was afraid to confront the pain and confusion. I even tried desperately to convince myself the abuse hadn't really happened. This was instantaneous and all my mental justifications rallied to convince me that it was not important. This, coupled with my counsellor telling me that he thought these events had aided my growth at the time, led me to suppress further exploration of the memories of my abuse once again.

Many times within my life I have been challenged with suicidal thoughts. I have woken up depressed, hopeless,

wondering what's happening to me, and why my life is falling apart around me and turning into a tragedy.

Why do I not want to spend time with my children? Why am I uncomfortable being around them, hugging them, loving them? Why do I not want to be loved and touched myself? Why do I feel so awkward with other men? Why is it I have become so short tempered with my children, my partner and am now desperately trying to hold on to my relationship and my professional life? All the things that are dear to me, I now hold onto by an extremely thin thread.

After many loving talks with my friends, counsellors and reading varied books on sexual abuse (especially *Victims No Longer* by Mike Lew) I realise that, for most of my life, I have been artfully convincing myself that everything is okay. To do this I have created an extremely capable bodyguard within me to ward off anyone who comes close to my wounds or my inner world. The unfortunate part about my bodyguard is that he doesn't trust anyone and now he doesn't even trust me, the man who created him.

I'm not a psychologist nor do I claim to be any more than a simple man, though at this point in my life one thing is for certain; this is not going to be a simple road. However, it is now the only road I can walk.

So this book is going to be about what I have discovered about being a man through my experiences, on my healing journey. I've now commenced weaving the fabric of my life back together again, with the incredible support of my good friend and partner, both her loving teenage children and our daughter. The journey of recovering the pieces of myself that I've left behind in my past has now commenced.

From these writings I'm hoping that a transformation will take place in my heart, soul, and mind. I also hope that these words will be of support to others who have experienced traumatic events similar to mine. I believe we need to speak of our wounds and the parts of our lives that have had no voice, no words – the parts that, if silenced, will forever keep

us living one step behind a rich and full life.

As I've walked the road of recovery, I've realised that the most vital and fundamental part of me that the abuse has affected has been my spiritual foundation and religious beliefs. I was not going to include these subjects for fear that it would alienate some readers. However, my spirituality has constantly come up to be addressed. Whether I like it or not, my parents entrusted my spiritual foundation to be developed and nurtured by the Church's religious orders for thirteen years.

The holes in this foundation needed to be discovered and refilled through the self-discovery of my personal connection with God. So I will leave these writings in because without them this book would not be an honest account of my life experience. I have also included a section on my disclosure and compensation process with the Church Education Office. I hope this will prove helpful to other men and women wishing to disclose their abuse, and I offer advice to them on how to best support themselves along the way.

This aspect of my healing process had such a profound impact on my life, on my stress levels and on the well being of myself and those around me. I now realise I could have cut a few more corners, jumped less fences and been much more prepared for what I was in for, had I the knowledge of someone else's experience to draw upon.

Through sharing my process, it may encourage you to include this avenue in the healing of your abuse. Even though the process of disclosure was extremely difficult for me, it was worth it for my peace of mind.

There is also a specific section that covers sexual abuse litigation. By including this section I have endeavoured to make the road less stressful and time consuming for you than it was for me.

This is a tale of one abuse survivor's experience. Certainly, the various affects that sexual abuse has on people of different backgrounds and cultures other than

my own must vary enormously. However from what I have seen, there are some common human responses that run true for all victims of sexual, emotional and physical abuse. This encourages me to tell my story, hoping that it may be of benefit not just to myself, but to other abuse survivors as well.

Today I ask myself: Why did sexual abuse happen to me? Why did emotional and physical trauma happen to me? What attracted this to me? What effect has this had on my spirituality and on my life? What lessons are there to learn from this kind of trauma? Will I be a better human being by learning from this? Will I be a more capable Dad, man, friend and lover?

I have always run from pain and from this journey's beginning it has been painful. Who is this man in me? Who am I? This whole book is about looking within, and about some of the treasures that I brought back from my journey of diving into me.

The book also includes poetry and lyrics from music that I have written over the years, which now form a theatrical play about being a man. This too has played a central part in my healing process, aiding me in piecing together my history and easing my inner bodyguard.

If you have been abused, or have had a relationship with someone who has been abused, I'm sure you are familiar with the heaviness that falls over us like a shroud at times. When this happens, it is the perfect time for us to ask for help, to reach out, speak honestly and trust someone. These are the times that we can take giant leaps forward in life, before the memory of the abuse is suppressed and buried again. Please, do not suffer in silence.

– John Saunders.

*Please note that the names of some individuals have been changed for legal reasons.

Foreword by Steve Biddulph

Once, not so many decades ago, it was commonplace to see a parent beating their child in the street, and though some onlookers may have frowned, nobody would have dreamed of intervening. Similarly, if the sounds of domestic violence rang out in the night air of a city or a country town, then that was seen as that couple's own private business.

Thankfully, our tolerance of the mistreatment of our fellow human beings has diminished, and today these actions would be much frowned on. However some standards have always been there. At no time in our history has it been acceptable, morally or legally, for adults to engage in sexual activity with children.

The power imbalance, the physical harm, the enormous emotional and spiritual damage, have led to some of the strongest words in the English language being applied to this activity: defilement, violation, atrocity. Sexual abuse of children was a crime at the time of convict settlement, and it still is today, and hopefully always will be. It was however, for two hundred years, largely a hidden crime. No one spoke of it; sheltered souls simply did not dream it possible.

In the last several decades, the hurt and harm has come to the surface in an extraordinary flood of disclosures that have coloured our view of history, and tarnished many reputations. Almost every counsellor or therapist working with men or women has heard first hand from clients stories of childhoods blighted, and lives lived in shame, self-loathing, or sexual dysfunction, as a result of being molested as a child, raped, or sexually assaulted by adults, in situations of supposed care and trust.

We have been forced to face up to the fact that this happens, and happens with frightening frequency. Not surprisingly, it was children who had difficult family backgrounds, or were vulnerable by virtue of being

orphaned, in boarding school, part of the stolen generation of aboriginal children, or otherwise lacking in strong adult support, who suffered the most serious and ongoing abuse.

Some Christian orders have a long and impressive tradition of helping uplift boys from low-income backgrounds, and this continues to this day. However some have been at the forefront in the public eye, as disclosures and convictions unfolded a pattern of abuse that was seemingly endemic to the order, recurring not just in Australia, but Ireland, England, Canada, and elsewhere.

The key feature of our understanding of paedophiles is that they are compulsive and serial offenders; that if left to do so, they harm hundreds of children. If we add together those who participated, those who knew but did nothing, and those whose job it was to know, and who did not, then few escape unscathed from responsibility. And in a religious order granted the highest public trust and support, a trust in past times bordering on reverence, this carries enormous accountability into the present day.

It's a cheap and easy exercise for us self-righteously to condemn child sexual abuse. What is more useful is to understand and get underneath what makes men or women into paedophiles, be they either the charming sociopath, or the vicious sadist. Christian orders were formed at a time when violence in schools was the norm. Children were beaten not only for misbehaving, but also for not learning, for misspelling a word, for clumsiness, for wetting their bed, for stammering. So fear and domination by force were acceptable parts of everyday school, orphanage and boarding house life.

To this we add the explosive complication of a celibate order, where all our understanding of human needs would indicate this to be a great danger. Human needs for affection, tenderness, sexual expression, and normal emotional development, were routinely thwarted in this kind of religious life, while sadism and violence (in the goal of

education) were sanctioned.

It's little wonder that a perverted and life-damaging subculture evolved beneath an idealistic and self-sacrificing exterior. It's likely that this subculture within the Church has become self-perpetuating, bred its own for many generations – as the victims of one generation became the perpetrators on the next.

The John Saunders story is a tiny fragment of this big picture; it is neither its worst example, nor its mildest. His harm was long lasting, tangible, and, combined with his family background, hugely destructive of his life. Because of his creative and vibrant personality, he is a good person to give us a window into this world. John's story is a mixture of tragedy, resilience, humour, and rage. He has taken the personal development path of the present, the new-age and therapy conscious ethos of the late twentieth century, to combat the Dickensian darkness of his childhood, and he is slowly getting well.

His descriptions of his treatment by the church's legal representatives will cause anguish to many readers – there is a sense of being doubly abused, a story common to many sexual assault victims. In his struggle with these legal abusers, just as with the physical abusers decades ago, he vacillates, quite understandably, between over compliance, being too nice, too understanding, and being deeply, cynically angry with what has happened to him.

The teacher who abused him did so through manipulating his need for affection, through sexual pleasuring, and through feigning attachment that was purely instrumental in setting him up for further misuse which he narrowly, perhaps intuitively, avoided. His body was not harmed as much as his spirit, emotions, and his capacity to love and trust.

John's exploration of his own growth, his gradual understanding of his family life, his opening to his inner world as he gradually dreams, thinks and feels his way into

his own unconscious, his efforts to give useful information and guidance to others on the same path, together with the warnings and resources for tackling a legalistic and defensive church bureaucracy, all make this a valuable book. This kind of childhood is part of our history as a nation, part of our struggle as men and women to be whole and it needs to be faced up to. John's story can inform and inspire, like any difficult journey that eventually brings us to a wider, more complete, view of the landscape of our life.

John shows real heroism in his determination to give and receive love in a world which more often deals in shame and exploitation.

– Steve Biddulph is one of the world's best loved parenting authors and educators. His books include *The Complete Secrets of Happy Children, Raising Boys, and The New Manhood*.

One Counsellor Reflects on Child Sexual Abuse

For the child victim of sexual abuse, often discarded after the abuse activity, there remains emotional distress and many unanswered questions. The abuse act serves to undermine and destroy hope and belief in self, childhood, adulthood, religion, God, parenthood, authority, relationships, intimacy, and faith. For the child victim it is impossible to place the events into a context that make any sense.

Consequently, subconscious defence mechanisms are automatically activated that isolate and anaesthetise the memory of the event, so that some semblance of normal life is possible. Work on the human life cycle indicates that in middle age, locked away memories and experiences become accessible to individuals. If these memories are not attended to or ignored, they find ways of gaining attention and support, and they become destructive.

From a personal experience and without the horror of having to face the abyss of personal betrayal and abuse, life presents as a challenge at the best of times. When reaching a point in my own life journey where weariness and fatigue has been a problem, I know that confrontation of past events is a threatening experience. I have struggled with my own sense of self worth, depression and despair for the future. I find it conceivable that suicide for some is a choice that frees them from the pain that knows no absolution or healing. Sexual abuse of children by the 'sacred' is the ultimate in betrayal.

Part 1

The Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse on my Adult Life

The First Recollections

Although having no recollection of being sexually abused at that time, I went to counselling at thirty-three years old to acquire some understanding on why I felt so depressed. In retrospect, my continual depression, exhaustion and stress were a result of using enormous amounts of energy just to hold back my true feelings and stay in the delusion that everything in my inner-world was 'okay.'

My first therapist was a psychologist named Dr. Smith. I saw him every week for approximately four months and it was during a session with him that I first recalled the sexual abuse. We had just commenced a relaxation exercise and as I lay on the floor Dr. Smith asked me to slow my breathing and focus on my breath.

Suddenly I recalled clearly the perpetrator placing his hand down my pants and fondling my penis. I blushed openly and felt a huge and uncontrollable shiver go through my whole body. I looked at Dr. Smith and felt exposed and threatened by being laid out on the floor. He asked me what was happening and I told him about my memory. Astonishingly, he immediately dismissed the recollection as not being anything of great importance, and we ended the session.

I went home feeling quite disorientated and during the next two weeks started to feel uneasy and sexually cut off from my partner, not wanting to be touched in a sexual way or even affectionately. I suddenly found myself masturbating a lot for sexual satisfaction rather than sharing intimacy with my partner despite feeling anxiety around my self-pleasuring and seeing it as wrong. Consequently, I would also reach orgasm very quickly during intercourse and have strong feelings of uneasiness around sexual play. During the

next two weeks I felt overwhelming feelings of anger arising and realised that I raged with anger at my perpetrator for abusing me. This rage had been suppressed, burning inside of me for decades.

I decided to talk to Dr. Smith about formally charging the perpetrator and exposing his crime to the world. Dr. Smith said once again that he didn't believe the abuse had done me any significant damage. He suggested that because I had 'enjoyed' the experience and cared for the man at the time (due to him fulfilling my desperate craving for an attentive father-figure) it was a productive relationship and I should get on with my life.

At this time I wanted so badly to believe everything was 'okay' that I accepted and followed Dr. Smith's advice to try to forget the memory and just get on with my life. He suggested that he couldn't do any more for me and that we end our therapy sessions, and I agreed that this was the best thing to do. But from this point on, my effectiveness in the day-to-day world gradually deteriorated.

As I write this, I find it relevant to add how important it is to choose a therapist who specialises in counselling sexual abuse victims. Dr. Smith assisted me remarkably in the areas in which he was capable. However, as soon as we stepped out of his comfort zone and into the area of sexual abuse, his lack of experience severely hampered his ability to facilitate my healing. For the next sixteen months I didn't receive any therapy and focused my attention on my work. However, I found it difficult to gain contracts and expand my business as I had done successfully in the past. Every time a large contract would come my way I would somehow lose it and not know why. I steadily grew more self-conscious and my self-esteem plummeted.

The surfacing of repressed memories of abuse triggered a lot of problems of which I had been unconscious for many years, negative behaviour against myself that had gone unnoticed. I found myself somehow sabotaging every

opportunity for success in my life. Work and personal relationships disintegrated. Cyclic self-destructive behaviour that used to occur every twenty-four, twelve, six or three months was now occurring weekly and daily.

I struggled the hardest with my depression. From when I first recalled my sexual abuse in my counselling session with Dr. Smith, my depression severely worsened and was now assailing me every day; it was unrelenting and like living in a constant nightmare. There was a deep turmoil and self-loathing raging inside of me. I had a razor-wire cage around my heart – a miserable attempt at emotional protection that cut both ways.

Absolute Confusion

> *Journal Entry: This morning the phone rang. It was the policeman investigating my sexual abuse claim. (I had recently decided to notify authorities of my teacher's sexual abuse of me when I was ten years old: I will cover this in later chapters.) The policeman told me that the previous day he had gone to visit my old teacher, the perpetrator. Apparently the perpetrator didn't recall who I was but said that he certainly didn't abuse me. When the policeman mentioned to him that another man (my classmate) had also made a formal complaint against him, the perpetrator said that he remembered this boy and that on two occasions he had sexually abused him. He was clear about this boy but not about me. I couldn't believe it! I said to the policeman that this seemed odd because I sat on the teacher's lap more than this other student and he even gave me a pet name; if he remembered the other boy then surely he would remember me.*

From the phone conversation I began to recall further memories of abuse and had acute flashbacks all day. These memories came and went in waves and so did my self-shame: It was lunchtime or after school and all the boys had left the

class except me. The teacher was wrestling with me in the classroom; we played lions growling at each other while the room was dark (I remember the room was made dark at times to watch slides from a projector.) I remember really enjoying this and then at one point he pressed his head between my legs into my crotch. Then he started to suck and lick my penis.

While I'm writing this, I'm getting aroused and experiencing absolute confusion; my mind is confused, my body is confused, and still this is the memory my body holds. I want to destroy him, I hate this!

A Corrupted Response to Intimacy

I am now aware that it was the abuse that created many of the problems I currently face in life, especially affecting my ability to trust and accept love. As I've developed a greater understanding of my abuse, I've managed to unburden a larger part of the responsibility onto the perpetrator rather than upon me as a little boy. After all, how could I be responsible at ten years old for something my little body and mind were not ready for?

Much of how I behave today comes from belief systems that I created unconsciously around the traumatic events of my youth. My young mind created coping mechanisms (acute self-protection modes) when confronted with the emotional, physical and spiritual trauma of abuse.

These days the coping mechanisms continue inside me, preventing me from ever feeling safe and causing me to withdraw from those who love me the most. Recently while we were driving in the car, my partner, sitting beside me, reached over and lovingly touched my leg.

Straight away I had flashbacks of sexual abuse flooding my mind and I felt completely violated by her touch. I started to cry because I couldn't enjoy her loving hand on my leg and she commenced crying as I told her what I was

experiencing. My partner noticed where my hand was – I was rubbing my ear, the same way I used to rub my ear when I would comfort myself as a young boy. My partner and I both looked at each other sadly, acknowledging the damage of my past experiences. For me it has been beneficial to attempt to understand and track these trauma response patterns when they are triggered.

Following is the pattern that was activated in the car while being touched by my partner:

1. A feeling of arousal in between my legs that became overwhelming like an uncontrollable wave over my body. Hyper-arousal.
2. A feeling of disgust, repulsion and guilt at myself for feeling this. (A shut down of my heart and caring towards myself.)
3. Extreme hurt for being betrayed by my partner who was causing me to feel this way. (A shut down of my heart and caring towards my partner.)
4. Conscious memory of my perpetrator's abuse of me.
5. Anger at myself for not knowing at the time that what he was doing to me was wrong.
6. Feeling betrayed by the realisation that my loving partner's hand was the trigger for this anger. Extreme anger.
7. Feelings of anger and confusion around someone else being in control of my sexuality as a child.
8. Feeling caged and not in control of my sexuality and my life in the present.

After being overwhelmed by all these feelings I went into damage control, desperately wanting to regain control over my sexuality and myself. The first person that I projected my thoughts onto (that I was not in control of my sexuality, that someone else was and that person was manipulating me sexually) was my partner. As we travelled in the car, I remained closed off from my partner and started thinking

about what it would be like being single again and having sexual encounters with anyone I wanted at any time. I felt so trapped, caged, controlled and overpowered. I projected these thoughts onto my partner so I could feel that I was in control of my sexuality again: 'She's too overweight, her body is not perfect, she's too old, she's not physically active enough, nor young enough, not exciting enough, gorgeous enough, smart enough or creative enough'.

I am aware now that the judgments I made towards my partner were triggered by my own fears and beliefs that I was unworthy and unlovable. It is such a battle for me to stay open hearted and accepting of others and myself during these times.

Fighting with Depression

> *I have been fighting my depression again for the past three days. I do not know if there are any words to express the pain I cage myself in. The physical exertion of running has moved the emotion through my body today and eased my temper though I have once again cut off from my partner and have shut down emotionally. I have been trying to act like I'm fine. However I feel like I am being eaten away. Dear God, I'm scared that I won't be able to pull myself up out of it. Help me, help me!*

The family had planned to stay with some friends for the weekend but I woke up on Saturday feeling so down that I didn't want to go. My partner became stressed by my shortness. I was at the kitchen table trying to suppress my pain and stop myself feeling useless (like a worthless piece of shit, as Dad used to say.) Everyone was waiting for me to make the decision of whether or not I would go.

Then Daniel my stepson walked over and begged me to come with them. Tears started to well in my eyes as I began to wonder what was happening to me. All of a sudden in my

mind's eye I saw a familiar image of myself walking into a forest with lots of tall trees (this image is what I see when I become extremely suicidal and I have often imagined it as the setting where I would take my own life.) Emotions I'd been suppressing over the last few days had finally taken hold of me, and this time I was really scared. I couldn't take the pain of this any more.

'What good am I?' I thought. 'I'm no good to anyone, especially my little daughter.'

I told my partner I was going to stay at home. What I didn't tell her was that I was going to walk into the forest up the valley and kill myself.

As they were just about to leave and say goodbye, a remarkable inner voice spoke to me. 'John, step aside and listen for a moment. Step outside of your feelings and say these words to your family, say them! Say them! Please, do it now!'

So I said the following words out loud, "I'm coming to be with you!" I did it! Dear God, I was so close. I'd never felt so crazy. We all hopped in the car. It was a four-hour trip and the forest scene faded from my mind the further we drove.

By Sunday night thanks to my friends I had received a massage, a session of Pranic (life-force) healing, cried openly about the struggle of moving through and healing my sexual abuse, picked wild lemons with my five-year-old daughter and made lemonade. I wasn't having suicidal thoughts any more and the trip turned me around.

Up until this point, I had fought the feelings of suicide internally and alone. Now I realised I had done something radically different and despite all my pain, hopelessness, shame and guilt, I chose not to shut down emotionally, or push loved ones away and suffer in silence. I decided to be around people, my family and my friends, and let them see me for who I was while I experienced this. More importantly I accepted their help and did not walk alone into the forest. I walked amongst them and let them see my wound fully

open. I didn't try to cover it up, like I had always done in the past, with anger, control, isolation and aloofness, or by attacking others around me.

Too often when I have thoughts that make me feel uncomfortable, I become unsafe and insecure within myself, and can go into the role of wanting to control everything and everyone around me. For example, I start cleaning up around the house obsessively. Regrettably, I also become a tyrant at the same time, like my father and mother always did. It never ceases to amaze me that the way my father handled the pain that he felt in his life runs parallel with the way I handle mine. However, there is one difference – I'm determined to break the destructive cycle and find another way. I can't help but wonder if my father also struggled to find another way.

Part 2

Childhood Memories

Memories of Dad

Dad met Mum just before the Second World War, and they got married and had two children before he went off to sign up. It has only been recently since my father's death that I learned he came back from the war a very different man. However, at that point in time, I was not even a glint in his eye. I was the youngest, and there were still six more glints before me!

Dad would always be working around the house, adding on bedrooms (as you can imagine), replacing floors and building paths through gardens that he'd made while employing the skilled child labour of my older brothers and sisters. The digging of fence holes in the ground was another activity my father would do from time to time. They would be approximately three to five foot deep and occasionally, after a heavy rain, the sun would burst through the clouds, and I would shed my clothes and jump in these holes naked, completely covering myself with mud. Then I'd call out to my father for help and he would come and lift me out, so I could run and lie in the hot sun on the pavement. The heat of the sun would dry the mud on my skin and slowly crack to peel off as I went running through the endless gardens that surrounded my father's house. So effortlessly I would lose myself in the fullness of my four-year-old imagination.

I received absolute joy being one with the Earth and trees in the gardens surrounding our house. I don't think I ever got closer to my father than I did in my early childhood. When school started I would hardly see him. In fact, these would turn out to be the best years of my life with him, and the most consistent. I don't remember him holding me, touching me, or cuddling me much after this time. The following are words to a song that I wrote in memory of my Dad.

Pendulum

The pendulum swings going back in my mind.
The pendulum swings pulling in my time, toys on a hill in line.
I remember now, climbing on your roof with my Zorro cape
on my feet already red from your painted iron,
it's a long way down if I can fly to your ground.
Will you come out then Dad, but you won't catch me crying.
I just can't wait, I just can't wait for your love.
I just can't wait, I just can't wait for your love.

The pendulum swings going back in my mind.
The pendulum swings pulling in my time, boys on a hill in line.
I remember now going to school, Christian Brothers rule,
my little legs tremble as I'm sent outside.
Dad, if I run home now will you see it somehow,
the beatings I'll get for my seven year smile.
I just can't wait, I just can't wait for your love.

Cause I'm a man, living these memories once again.
Begotten son, forgotten son, blood of forefathers, pain of this son.
Have your memories begun, hopeless pain of our sons
and all the wars of our sons, and all the shame of our sons,
have your memories begun, Christian Brothers to Christian Sons,
and all the abuse of this son, and all the shame of this son,
have your memories begun. Because I'm a man living these
memories once again, begotten son, forgotten son, blood of
forefathers, pain of this son. Will I seal the wound from my
son, and face the demons that come. Will I break the hold
of the past and start living my life full cast.

The pendulum swings going back in my mind,
the pendulum swings pulling in my time,
three men in a Church in line as another son dies.
He went to war, a brave man I'm sure, his whole body
trembled as the shrapnel knocked him to the floor,
and as he pulls the pilot aside and flies the crew home alive,
will I ever get to know this man from the war he fought inside.

I was around three years of age and my parents were having difficulty looking after me, so Dad decided to take me to the doctor. He asked the doctor ,while I was there,

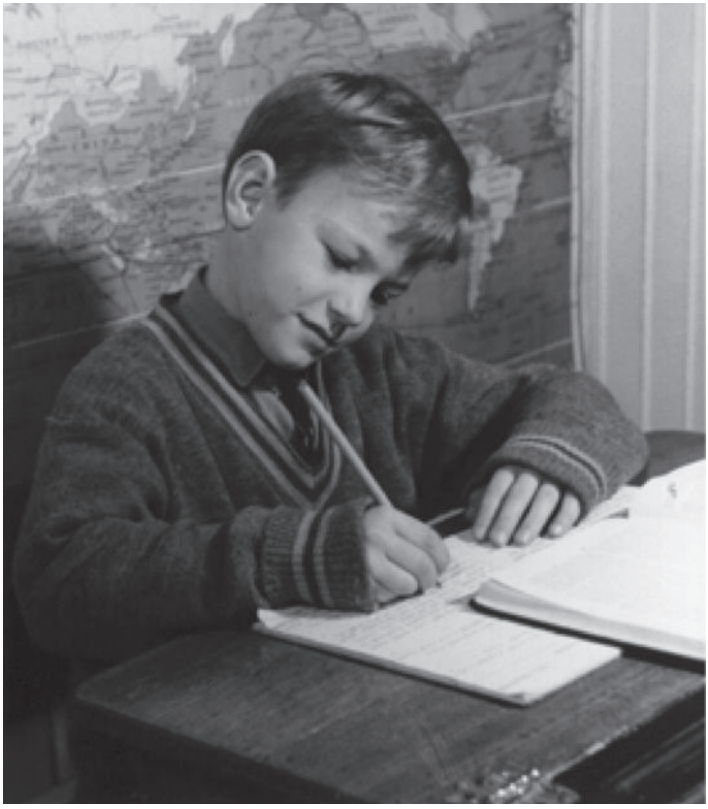
whether he could give me something to slow me down and the doctor gave Dad a prescription for some drugs. I could not speak at the time, though I did understand what he was asking the doctor for. The effects of the syrup, a prescription drug, on me was enormous, it would make me tired and want to sleep. I can remember waking up drowsily and stumbling around wondering what was wrong with me.

From this point on I believed achingly that my father was unhappy with me and couldn't love me for who I really was. I had a great fear of his anger; I could never understand how Dad could be so cruel. His strapping and fury sent fear like a raging fire through my brothers and sisters and I, as well as my mother.

I housed this terror until the day of his death, only then telling him of my fear of him. He would pass this off as a joke. Dad died at seventy-eight years of age of Parkinson's disease. I was thirty-four.

Memories of Mum

My mother was about 157cm tall (5'2") and knew how to run a household (she had to, it was nine against one.) I believe the idea was (as it was with Dad) to employ once again the help of the skilled child labour to look after the more recent members of our family. All clothing was handed down from oldest to youngest. Here is a picture of me with my school jumper that was four sizes too big!



The unfortunate part of employing child labour was that sometimes an adult's strength and understanding was more suited to dealing with what was happening at the time.

My sister told me about one such incident: I was around two years of age when a few of my older brothers and sisters (older meaning six- to ten-year-olds) were asked to hold the fort together at home while Mum and Dad were working at the family fabric shop. My sister heard me crying in my cot and went to take care of me. After trying to calm me down and put me back to sleep she decided to get me out of my cot to comfort me. She was too little to reach over the top of the cot with two hands, so she grabbed hold of my arm and tried to pull me out. This dislocated my shoulder.

Later I asked my mother about this incident, and she told

me that I fell outside, off a swing. There have been similar stories to this one that have been changed over the years by my mother. She was the keeper of the vital pieces of information needed to help place together the puzzle of the moments of mystery within my family. To follow is a poem I wrote about my Mum:

Mother

The doors they slam on every man,
I silence the Gods by your command,
I drop to my knees, for life to appease,
The power I place in you by your leave.

I yearned to be loved by you,
To be kissed forever, held so true.
To bury my cheek in the arm I knew.
For one to be one with you,
for one to be one with you.

Was there ever a time when my will was mine?
Was your will alive for the last of nine?
Trembling knees held tight locked in fright.
As a little boy fights for the will of his life.

I will shake cracks till they split in two.
Break walls commanding fixed point of view.
I drop to my knees for life to appease.
The power I place in you by your leave.

When I was young my mother, through the stress of caring for nine children, would sometimes lose her temper and become hysterical for a short period of time. These states were very scary for us all. I remember hiding from my mother in the walk-in wardrobe in my parents' room. I was petrified and sat motionless in the closet as I heard someone enter the room.

The closet door was ajar so I could just see through it. I saw Mum sitting on the bed with strips of white calico bandages tied around both her wrists. I saw red blood soaking through the white cloth. There were two other

people in the room that I could see but my mum couldn't. I knew one was her younger brother who died in the Second World War, and the other was a friend. They were trying to comfort her as she cradled her face in her hands.

I asked my mother when I was thirty-three if she recalled anything like this happening. She responded by saying that nothing like this ever did. However, one of my sisters has since confirmed the memory. I cannot explain the presence of the two other people in the room, nor will I try to. I leave this up to you.

Another early memory of my mum was when we would sit together on the couch. I would suck my fingers and snuggle up to her arm. She had a very chubby arm, and I remember how soft and warm it was on my face. Even if it was just her arm, I made the most of it. This was about as far as physical affection would travel between us, and one of the only times she was still enough for me to get close to her.

My mother was a disciplinarian, she made sure I was clothed, clean, had a full belly and was always escorted or observed by my older brothers and sisters. It turns out that my sisters were the ones who took care of me a lot at this age. Mum, not having large amounts of spare time between maintaining the upkeep of the home and working in the family shop, didn't have much time for me or my brothers and sisters.

There was another side to my Mum; one that was kept from the outside world and that only her children knew of. Nine children to feed, dress, bathe and look after when sick was a monumental task and one destined to fail if control was not gained at an early age. Mum used her Church religion and fear as her tools of control. References to the Devil were used frequently – my mother wasn't one to deal out physical pain as much as engendering psychological fear.

On a few occasions she would lock me outside at night and this frightened me greatly. I was so scared of the dark, thunderstorms and the cold. I felt that my very survival was

dependent on the approval of my mother. Mum would also punish me by telling me at night that the Devil would come and take me away because I was bad. This made me feel terrified and unworthy of God's love.

Somehow at a very young age mum placed herself in the position of authority of what self-love I could feel or not feel. Punishments depended on her judgment of my behaviour. This led me to despair: how I felt about myself was very dependent on how my mum felt about me. This is still a challenge. I now project this pattern onto other people, especially women, in my life.

God and the Devil

I was about three years old when my older brother told me that it was time for us to go to Heaven and that I should go and pack my bags. I was so happy, as I wanted to go to this place more than anything in the world. I rushed to my room and commenced packing the clothes and toys that were dear to me. With this complete, I went out to the living room looking for my older brother. I was full of excitement knowing we were going to a place where I would be loved and accepted by the God who had created me – and created love itself. I cannot express in words how much this meant to me.

I found my brother and asked him whether he was packed and ready to go. He looked at me and started laughing. He told me how silly I was to have believed him, that this wasn't real, it was a joke. My heart sank in my chest. I was devastated.

I spoke to my brother about this incident thirty years later and he apologised with tears in his eyes for playing such cruel tricks on me. We both realised that as much as he thought at ten it was just a joke, he had also desperately wanted to leave, and to believe that there was a place called Heaven where he could be fully loved and accepted. He recalled finding it unbearable to watch me change from an

amazing, carefree and loving spirit, to a lost and frightened child bound by fear.

Our environment did not support us to love each other and ourselves. We were taught that God (the Creator), Jesus and Love were outside ourselves, living somewhere far away in a place called Heaven. Despite being far, far away, the Creator could still know my every thought and see and hear everything I did, especially if what I did was wrong, sinful and bad. Even if I just thought it!

Not only could I be punished and rejected from Heaven, I could even be sent to Hell for all eternity, where nothing existed, only pain. It was terrifying! By the time I was four years old in my world there was a Devil, who destroyed everything, there was God, who created all things, and there was me. If I misbehaved I would go to Hell where the Devil lived. F o r e v e r.

I was taught that at birth, by nature and by God, children were born impure and not worthy of divine love and trust. I now ponder if I should have said to Mother, "Please, please let the devil take me away! It could not be any worse than this!"

Early Schooling

In 1965 my whole life was going to be turned upside down as I was four years of age and my mother had decided that it was time for me to go to kindergarten. I recall my sister telling me that there was a Nun at this kindergarten who would pinch her to punish her if she misbehaved, and one day she came home with dark bruises on her arm. I was so scared that I begged Mum not to take me to this school and asked whether I could go next year when I was five. Mum ignored my pleas, dropped me at the kindergarten and left. There was a roll of carpet down the back of the classroom so I crawled into it, curled up, hid, and wept.

This memory is very distressing for me, especially my memory of the car ride and my mother's ice-cold determination to be rid of me for the day. This was her ticket to freedom as, after nine children, the light at the end of the tunnel was finally visible.

In her haste to be rid of me, my mother threw me into the institution before I was ready – I was only four years old and small for my age. This was to have a long lasting effect on me, being the smallest in my class most of the time and behind the others' physical, emotional, and mental development by approximately a year.

From kindergarten I progressed into first class and my daily prayers must have worked, as I still hadn't had the pinching-Nun as a teacher, though the Nuns did patrol the playground at morning tea and lunchtime. I always stayed clear of them, my sister's experience still fresh in my mind. But in second class at school

I was taught by a young Nun who would actually turn out to be my saving grace. She was kind and loving. My work improved, I was allowed to sing, in fact, there was one time we had a class presentation of our work to our parents and one of the projects wasn't ready to be displayed so the Sister came up to me and said, "Johnny, we're stuck, we're not ready and I don't know what to do, could you help by singing a song for the parents to give us more time?"

I was so proud; I sang my songs with such joy, as this beautiful woman believed in me heart and soul. She watched me sing and had such confidence in me, and at six years of age she gave me a gift – a gift I had not received before and still cherish to this day. She accepted me for who I was and how I expressed this in life. I believe this was one of the few times that I have felt self-love.

The year was 1969 and I was seven years old when I commenced school at a Christian College. Homework was something that I found difficult at the best of times as I had an attention span only for adventure. And the day came

around quite quickly when I needed to be disciplined for this, or so I was told. The Brothers were well equipped when dealing out disciplinary measures; the straps were about a foot long and about one and a half inches wide. I recall they were weighted in some way and this weight was sandwiched between two leather strips that were stitched together. Amazing weaponry – very effective in breaking the spirits of seven-year-old boys.

A brother could have two to three straps or canes in his desk and one in his black robe. They would choose between strapping you across the legs, hands, knuckles, or backside. Some teachers would tell boys to stand with both hands out to the sides as if they were on a cross, facing away from the brother, not knowing when the cane was going to strike. It was not uncommon to see a duster fly across the room and hit some pupil in the head for not paying attention or having his hands below the desk. "Hands out of sight can do the Devil's work", as the Brother's would say.

So I was sent out of the classroom to wait in the corridor for my first experience of corporal punishment. Recently I'd seen a boy with two whip cuts across his face standing outside the Principal's office with teachers laughing around him while he wept.

Albury mornings were bitterly cold, and I was shivering so much from cold and fear that my foot was bouncing up and down uncontrollably and I peed myself. I decided to run for it, my heart was pounding and my legs were moving so fast I thought I was flying. I ran across the playground and climbed the cyclone fence, escaping from the prison that was caging my spirit! I arrived at my parent's shop out of breath and told them what had happened and how I didn't want to go back.

I'd like to tell you that this story had a happy ending and I was spared, but unfortunately I can't. My father sent me back and I was beaten for the first time by those straps. It hurt so badly and the straps bruised and burst the blood

vessels in my hands.

I remember how some teachers, before strapping or caning us, would ask whether we were left or right handed. I guess they did this so we could still write. These were the nice ones. Boys who had been beaten on both hands tried desperately to pick up their pens with their injured hands so they wouldn't fall behind in class, while having the brother scream at them for being a sissy and that they would be beaten once again if they didn't stop crying.

I remember my own tears dropping on pages of my work after being beaten and the tears smudging my writings, and knowing that I would have to do it all again that night otherwise I would be punished for it the next day.

In the last three years the blood vessels between the joints of my index and middle fingers of my left hand have started to burst occasionally and bleed. When they burst now I'm reminded of these school days.

Running in the Playground

In school, almost every kid would run around in the playground in their breaks. That's what kids did and, like now, some areas of the playground were designated 'NO RUNNING'.

I remember a time when there was a semi-retired brother on playground duty. He decided to discipline some of us for running close to one of these areas. There were a few of us to correct, but he was the type of teacher who seemed to just grab the closest boy to him, which this time happened to be me.

He began by telling me calmly not to run, and then asked me for my hand, so we could shake on it. I offered him my hand, as he had asked in a friendly way. However once he had my hand he changed. He proceeded to slowly crush it with his own while slowly explaining to the other boys present the rules of the playground. I recall the joints popping in my fingers while I was trying to pull my hand free. The pain

became so intense I began to cry. When he saw me cry he stopped.

I decided to stay away from this Brother as it was humiliating to have this happen to me in front of the other boys and it hurt my hand like hell. After this, I noticed that he would do this to other boys as well, only letting go of their hands when they cried. He found it thrilling to hurt boys in front of others.

Unfortunately I was so starved of affection and approval at home that I could not resist it when a Brother decided to single me out for what appeared to be 'special' attention. I hadn't yet learnt how to tell the difference. On reflection, should children have to learn that through their carers?

Mr. Smitts, Sexual Abuse Perpetrator

In sixth class I was ten years old. My teacher, Mr. Smitts, seemed like a great teacher; he almost never got angry and very rarely used to beat us. This was very different from the other male teachers I had experienced.

Mr. Smitts was very cuddly. He used to tell me how gorgeous I was. It was so warming to have a grown-up say these things to me and hug me, I'd never had so much affection or felt so loved and appreciated. He would set various projects for us, asking certain boys up to see him at his desk while the class was busy scribbling away at one thing or another. It was a lot of fun.

He had his favourite pupils and I remember how excited I was on the day that he asked me to come up and sit on his lap. He was so warm, big and cuddly. So I jumped up on his lap and it was a little bit squashy but it was so very cozy. We then looked at my work and talked.

I really enjoyed his hugs and kisses and thought if I was lucky I might get to sit on his lap again. One day I got my own name from him, 'JJ'. I really loved him calling me this because it was something special between him and me. He called me

this all the time in class when I was good.

One day he asked me to come and sit on his lap; there wasn't much room between Mr. Smitts and his desk so it was very cozy and he nuzzled my neck. It made me feel very warm all over and he blew in my ear, giving me goose bumps. He then placed his nice warm hand underneath my shirt and on my belly. This made me tingle inside. I felt lovely and mushy; it made me excited and like I sort of wanted to go to the toilet. I felt really warm and nice. I thought why couldn't my own dad be this way? Mr. Smitts always smelt very clean and his after-shave was nice.

One day when he asked me up to his desk to sit on his lap, he placed his hand on my stomach straight away. It felt so warm as he rubbed me, then slowly he slid his hand down my pants. It felt very warm, making me feel fuzzy and drift away. He told me I was a lovely boy as he rubbed my tummy and nuzzled my neck.

When it was time to get down he pulled his hand out of my pants and I went back to sit at my desk. Almost every time that I went to sit on his lap now he would put his hand down my pants. I was very special to him. I really enjoyed going up to his desk because it would mean that I would get to sit on his lap and be cuddled. He used to hug me very firmly and then place his hand underneath my shirt on to my belly; he would always hold me and rub me. He used to squash me between my legs with his hand and kiss me, giving me tingles over my body.

Soon it was time to go away on the school camping trip. One night as we sat around the campfire Mr. Smitts asked me if I would sing a song. I sang 'Fire and Rain', and then he asked me if I would come and see him just before bedtime. I said yes, although when the time came to go and see Mr. Smitts, a friend and I were having so much fun playing spotlight and exploring, that my friend encouraged me to stay playing with him instead. I now thank him deeply for this.

The next day was Friday and time to go home. I remember Mr. Smitts being really upset with me, I'd never seen him like this before – he wouldn't speak to me. I felt really wrong for not seeing him the night before. All weekend I felt sick not knowing how he would treat me when I got to school on Monday and whether he would cane me or not.

At school on Monday Mr. Smitts asked me up to his desk, he stood me in front of him and didn't let me sit on his lap, then he got a book out from his desk that had all my classmate's names in it and said that this was the book that showed whether we were good students or not and that this would show up on our report card to our parents. The book had a column in it where he had placed arrows pointing up or down indicating whether we were well behaved on the school camp or not. He showed me my name and I was the only one who had an arrow pointing down, apart from my friend who I had played with that night. I cried and told him that I was sorry. He was very angry with me but he said that if I was good and did what he told me to do, he would make the arrow point upwards. Soon I would be sitting on his lap again. It excited me to sit on his lap; this was an excitement that I had not experienced with anybody else. Sometimes though my stomach would get a cold feeling through it as if it was hollow. It was around this time that I frequently became sick in my stomach and had to stay home from school.

My mother would come and pick me up from school sometimes and one afternoon Mr. Smitts came out to the car to meet my mum. I was very excited, he gave me a kiss on the cheek and called me "JJ". He told Mum what a good boy I was and I felt very special.

Many times followed where I would sit on my teacher's lap and we would rub noses, he would hold me firmly between his desk and himself and then he would slide his hand down my pants. I would feel this tingling warm feeling between my legs as he rubbed my penis. I could never see what he was doing, only feel it. I remember him rubbing me

underneath my underpants.

Sometimes when other boys would come up to his desk while I was sitting on his knee, he would take his hand out, then after they had left, he would quickly slide his hand back into my pants. I remember sometimes I would want them to hurry up and leave, so I could feel all tingly and warm again.

At times he would touch me and that would make my tummy quiver. When this would happen I would daydream and go far away and not know where I was, and then come back feeling like I had just woken from a deep sleep.

I craved the love and approval of a father figure so much that I adored the attention I was receiving and I became very attached to Mr. Smitts. But after I came back from a three-week break from school due to having an operation, I recall Mr. Smitts wanted nothing more to do with me, as if there was something wrong with me. The attention I was getting from him prior to having my operation had suddenly disappeared. This made me feel sad and rejected, wondering what I had done wrong. I recall he did not want to be around me any more. He would get annoyed with me easily and turned his attention to his other favourite boys.

Why did he dump me? The operation, which was to fix a valve in my testicle (due to a prior accident), may have scared him. I can only guess, but perhaps he felt frightened that this operation had something to do with what he had done to me. Or maybe I was not 'pure' enough for him any more now I was scarred, 'damaged goods' so to speak.

Bernie Bung-Eye

In high school my class master was Mr. Crisp. He had one eye sewn shut and no one had ever been game to ask why. His nickname was Bernie Bung-Eye. He had two 'paddles' that he would use on our backsides if we stepped out of line. I believe they were twelve- and fifteen-inch rulers bound with electric insulating tape. Boy did they sting, even if you

had an exercise book down your pants! The most hits ever recorded in the history of one 'Bernie Bung-Eye period' was forty-five. That's one every minute, just for the record.

Well, the day came around that the class decided that this record would be broken. The period began and we commenced counting each hit in silence. Bernie did his best to keep up the pace, even if he did have to swallow a Bex headache powder, straight off the folded wrapping paper, to keep up with us.

As I looked around it was like a war zone, there were boys everywhere jumping up and down and dragging their behinds along desk seats to reduce the sting. As the end of the period came closer I remember some of us counting the hits out loud, "43, 44, 45…"

Then the whole scene turned into slow motion. Bernie became one with his 'electric insulated ruler' as he realised that we were trying to achieve something for once. The paddle flew down to meet some brave war hero's arse for the very last time. The kids' eyes were popping out of their heads. Bernie's eye was popping out of his head!

Everybody was poised as the big forty-six was struck, just as the school bell rang out! The classroom exploded with excitement. It was an emotional scene. We had set a new world record. I think even Bernie had a smile on his face as the last bead of sweat dripped from his brow.

Wonder Woman

Mum had the view that sex was only for making babies. She believed that any exploration of sex was dirty and possibly evil, only to be entered into when married. Regrettably we would be starved of physical nurturing to the point where the girls were told not to sit on my father's lap. Any hugs that passed between him and his daughters were given a sideways glance by my mother. My sisters were led to believe things like – if you french-kissed a boy you would be-

come pregnant and if a boy touches you on your breasts you would also become pregnant.

I recall at a very young age that my private parts were off limits to exploring (which unfortunately drew more attention to this area). When I was around fourteen, I recall being very sick with a fever. I was lying in bed drifting in and out of sleep; unsure whether I was awake or dreaming. I woke from one dream very aroused; I think in the dream Wonder Woman was chasing me. I woke up playing with myself and then felt the most amazing feeling within my body. I quickly stopped playing with myself but this feeling kept on increasing and before I knew it, I had my first orgasm.

I will always remember this feeling, though more importantly what happened next. I felt this sticky wetness in my boxer shorts and this scared me greatly as I had no idea what was happening to me. I decided to call Mum in and tell her what happened. She came in and then quickly left to go and get my father. On their return Mum informed me that I was a bad boy and had committed a Venial sin and would now have to go to confession. I wonder now how my father could just stand there and listen to my mother say these things to me?

A few days later I would go to confession and inform the priest, who told me to say three *Hail Marys* and one *Our Father*. He didn't exactly mention not to do it again or that I would burn in Hell, so I thought, just three *Hail Marys*, one *Our Father*?

This might be worth exploring again and maybe again, and perhaps again! I'm making light of this now but at the time it was very distressing for me. It was clear I could not speak of anything in regard to my sexuality with my parents.

To this day I still feel guilty at times when I give pleasure to myself, having to ward off my shame. I also over the years have hidden from my partners that I am sexually aroused by them for fear of being shamed.

It wasn't until I was fourteen that I discovered and perfected the art of masturbation. All those years of pull

starting the Victa lawn mower finally paying off.

It was around this time that I realised why my Mum was sewing up my boxer shorts, and stitching holy medals into the pockets of my pants and into my sisters' bras; This, of course, was to remind us that God was watching! Once again, the denial of the existence of these natural things brought more focus on to them.

> Boys' first orgasms are milestones in their development and need to be recognised as such. Whether mother, father or friend, please consider it to be similar to a young woman having her first period, her first cycle with the earth. She is now united with all women. For boys it is their first cycle with the earth. They are now united with all men. It's a sign of transition from child to young adult and a significant rite of passage.

The shame that was placed upon me by my parents for playing with myself is still with me at times. It helps greatly to have a partner who is open to you sharing the way you feel, if shame closes in on your lovemaking. Keeping eye contact through lovemaking helps heal the bond with shame and break it.

Dread

I still have dreams of being victimised at high school. I am scared of disclosing the following for fear of being judged as weak. I judge myself as being weak, as I wish I'd stuck up for myself in some way. I still feel a blanket of shame falling upon me now.

One semester I became sick for almost the whole term and Bernie, God bless him, sent my work home to me. I attended school for only one to two weeks of that term. I was ashamed that I didn't want to go to school, but I felt that I just wasn't like the other boys any more, and I didn't know why school frightened me. I moved very far behind in

class, I just wanted to stay home with Mum. I was called a hypochondriac and a Mummy's Boy at school. I really didn't want to be this way – I really wanted to be the same as all the others. Why couldn't I?

I used to get sick in my stomach and throw up from feeling nauseous. Mum would then come and pick me up to take me to the doctor. I remember sitting in the waiting room feeling so nauseous and guilty because the doctor said that he couldn't find anything wrong with me, that there wasn't anything wrong with me. This would happen many times and was very distressing to me as a young boy. I felt weak, different and separate from the other boys for some unknown reason. I couldn't be the same, I just couldn't, and all I wanted was to be like everyone else.

Some days at school I would feel so cold, I would shiver as if I was in shock and no matter how many jumpers I would throw on I just couldn't seem to get warm. Do you know that feeling, when you are so cold that it passes right through your bones and into your core? I believe that this was dread.

In the years that followed, my scholastic abilities diminished, I was easily distracted from my work and found it difficult to maintain focus. I would also find myself a target for bullies: students and teachers alike.

Mr. Beetle and Mr. Rollo

In Years Nine and Ten I would be introduced to two lay teachers who would be my Class Masters: Mr. Beetle and Mr. Rollo. Mr. Rollo's nickname was 'The Persecutor,' or 'Basher,' as everyone knew that if you didn't behave yourself you would be persecuted and then caned (i.e. bashed). In the last years of my schooling I would experience this teacher's abuse on many occasions.

Some teachers had a presence that would gain true respect from the students. The boys would look up to these teachers and follow their guidance. They had clearly

defined boundaries that would rarely be crossed. I'll always remember these teachers. They were the ones that if pushed to raise the cane you would see pain in their eyes, they had run out of ideas to help a student, but you could see that they had searched their heart and soul to find another way. As they caned across the hand it would be without the intention of inflicting pain, the strikes would be controlled and measured and not done out of anger or enjoyment. I praise these teachers for their efforts, and I accept that these disciplinary measures were part of the time that I lived in.

However, I find it difficult to accept the following… On one occasion our physical education teacher sent a piece of poster board around to his classes on which all the boys were to sign their names. Unfortunately for me, instead of writing my name I wrote my nickname. That's when it all started. The teacher, Mr. Beetle, wanted to know who had written this. Trembling with fear, I told him the truth. With great anger he gave me 'four cuts' of the cane while he stood on the platform at the front of the class with me standing on the floor below, about six inches lower than the platform.

This hurt incredibly, but at fourteen I had learnt just to take it and close down on the pain. To cry showed weakness, and I definitely wasn't going to show him how much he'd hurt me, he'd just humiliate me further. He caned with such vengeance, it wasn't uncommon for his canings to burst again the capillaries between the joints of my fingers.

On this occasion, he wanted to give me six cuts of the cane, but I believe new guidelines on corporal punishment had just been put into place; these restricted a teacher from caning a pupil more than four times in one day. So, there I was thinking that the worst was over and I had got off pretty lightly, even though both my hands were swollen and the joints of my fingers bleeding. (It's astonishing what we can be convinced is normal behaviour).

The end of the period came and who should walk past and stick his head in to see who got caned? Mr. Rollo. I was

told to wait back while the other students left, meanwhile

Mr. Beetle explained to Mr. Rollo the heinous crime that I had committed. Mr. Rollo looked at me in disgust and asked Mr. Beetle if he had caned me yet. Mr. Beetle informed him that he had and I clearly remember the disappointment on Mr. Rollo's face, as he knew he couldn't repeat the caning again himself.

Mr. Rollo looked at me and suggested to Mr. Beetle that he take over from here. Mr. Rollo told me to follow him down to the Principal's office where he was going to phone my parents and tell them about the appalling act that I had performed, and that I would be expelled from the school.

He stopped me where two flights of stairs met, out of sight of other teachers and students. He threatened me with his size, standing over me and hissing that I was hopeless, that I was a disgrace to the school and that when the Principal found out he would expel me, and when my parents were informed they would be disgusted with me and know that I was pathetic.

I felt so scared, so alone and ashamed, he was so adept at making me feel like a worthless human being. He decided to find Mr. English, the physical education teacher. When he saw me, I believe Mr. English was actually shocked to see the state of emotional distress that I was in. However, I think he felt he had to keep up appearances in front of Mr. Rollo.

Mr. Rollo said that what I had done was disgusting. I recall how much Mr. Rollo was enjoying the power he was wielding over me. Mr. English pretended to be angry and got me in a headlock. The look on Mr. Rollo's face was one of excitement and glee as he had seduced another into joining his game. He was reveling in my fear.

I started to cry and Mr. Rollo enjoyed this even more. I felt so betrayed by Mr. English. Mr. Rollo had won, I was broken and he let me go. We never got to the Principal's office.

On another occasion I remember I had left a novel that we were studying in Mr. Rollo's class at home. Mr. Rollo proceeded to walk me down to the Principal's office in order

to get me suspended. I wasn't the only one to leave books at home yet I was one of the students that he took special delight in breaking, psychologically and emotionally.

He told me that I was a fool, stupid, that I would never make it and why did I bother trying when I wasn't worth his time? He told me that I would be a failure, then he walked me to the end of the top floor where Mr. Beetle was holding his class and walked directly in and started loudly informing Mr. Beetle and the class how stupid Saunders was and how Saunders would never make it in life.

Mr. Beetle followed with his favourite response, "Don't think Saunders, I told you not to think."

This was said in a mono-tonal voice, loudly so the whole class could laugh as well. I found this enormously humiliating and soul destroying.

Mr. Rollo then took me upstairs where another teacher, a Mr. Reding, was holding his class. He informed Mr. Reding of what I had done and proceeded to humiliate me in front of that class.

By now I was barely holding it together as the class called out "S-a-u-n-d-e-r-s". On more than one occasion he would spend up to a whole period punishing me in this way, taking me to the other teachers' classrooms and ridiculing me in front of them and their students. I was burning with shame and humiliation from being treated this way, not to mention the fear that I was feeling, knowing that I would eventually be caned.

He took me back to his class, and with great anger caned my hands. It was a running joke in class if I answered a question incorrectly Mr. Beetle would retort, "Saunders, don't think, I told you not to think." I wanted so much to do well; I just found it so difficult remembering information and remaining focused. Why couldn't I remember things?

It's All Got To Do With Power

If you were a bully humiliated by a teacher, often the next thing was to bully someone else. The whole bullying culture was cyclic and left up to 'natural selection' by the school to balance itself out.

However, if both teachers and students were victimising a student, well, there often weren't many places to go. Like some, I'd hide in the library. Sometimes this would work, sometimes not. Bullies knew where to look.

I remember another time when our class heard and saw a brawl outside. I recall that day a collection was being taken to raise money for our school charity; the class raising the most money would be allowed to leave school early for the day.

Word passed around that a boy in the class next door who had not given his money to the charity had been was bullied by some boys, fell down the stairwell and had been taken to hospital. The police arrived a short time later, and we were told not to talk about what had happened on the stairwell.

Some twenty-five years later, I met a man from the class of this boy who was bullied. He told me what he saw and knew. He said I was right; the boy's mum did give him money to buy groceries after school. Some bullies in his class wanted to leave school early so they needed a few more dollars to win the competition and this boy had money and a teacher was not present. The boys pushed him down the stairwell. The boy was taken to hospital with serious injuries and the police were called to the school to investigate.

Time in this case had not distorted the memory. This man I met recounted more than a few school experiences that were similar to mine. However, there was one that stood out above the rest. He told me of the time that his cousin and friend had been asked to visit the cardinal's chambers, and once there were asked to undress. Scared, they ran home

and told their parents. Their parents said that a man who represents God and the Church at such a high level would never do such a thing and not to go spreading such disgusting lies ever again.

Dad's Accident

When I was fourteen my father was making his way home from work and was struck down by a car. The accident broke three or four of his ribs, and fractured his hip and a leg. He also suffered concussion and he received thirty to forty stitches in his head.

I was the first to find out that he had just been involved in a major car accident and I remember how I hoped that he might die. Waves of excitement washed over me as I entertained the fantasy that he may not ever come home.

I felt very guilty at having these feelings and couldn't understand why I felt this way about my dad. My father was a very angry man who didn't like the life that he was living. He felt trapped and with this came bouts of depression and rage. His anger would spill out into his life and the hardest area hit was his family.

In the morning he would get up early to shower and get himself ready for work. While he was in the shower I would be wakened by him calling out to God, asking to be taken away from all of this. He would repeat this over and over and I would lie in bed, wondering to myself what was wrong. I felt so helpless and would place the pillow over my head at these times to drown out my father's voice.

He was so removed from us that none of us felt we would be able to help; it was not even a consideration. For me, I felt that if I got close to him I would be beaten, especially if I questioned his behaviour.

After Dad's accident, his physical and mental condition deteriorated and in the following five years he would show signs of Parkinson's disease. His depressions would be of

longer duration and he would communicate less and less with the family. He could not cope with any conflict within the family, so he would constantly be threatening violence if there were any hint of conflict. If anyone challenged him on an issue, he would kick them out of the house or raise his fist whilst moving towards them to backhand them across the face, saying, "Get to your room!"

I believe deep in his heart he did not want to physically violate us, so before he lost further control he would yell at us to go to our rooms.

Through my teenage years, my Father's annoyance with me would grow and grow until he would quite often not speak with me at all, other than to remind me of my chores or call me a "shithead", or a "cunt", "useless", or a "little Johnny wait awhile." He became unapproachable for days on end, telling us not to talk to him. His silence was deafening.

Jonathan Livingstone Seagull

In regard to home life, when asked I would always say that it was fine, that I was great! I made out that nothing was ever wrong, even though most of the time it was quite the opposite.

Home life was extremely difficult. I would feel self conscious and sad when I saw other parents playing and physically displaying their affection with their sons and daughters. It was so important for my parents to demonstrate to the outside world that we were the perfect Church family. More important than sharing the genuine affection I craved.

Our family life was a performance for the perceived benefit of others. To escape I would constantly overstay my welcome at my friends' places. Some could see my confusion and need, and let me stay just one more night.

One friend that I used to stay with was an Indian boy – he and his family had moved here from India when he was ten. In the seven years that we knew each other, I spent some

wonderful times with him and his parents. His parents were warm-hearted, understanding and they listened to me. Each time I visited them the father would call me Jonathan Livingstone Seagull, after the book written by Richard Bach.

When he called me this my heart would fill and my chest would open up. I've wondered whether or not my friend's father fully recognised how much I was in need of help. Perhaps he felt that the best support he could offer was to plant the seed in me that I was capable of going out on my own, separate from the rest, like Jonathan Livingstone Seagull.

> If your child ever has a friend stay with you that doesn't wish to leave your family's company, see what you can do to help, even if it is just a book, a warm hand on the shoulder or the offer of a loving, listening ear.

Dad's War

Sometimes Dad would talk about his experience of the war in a humorous way with my brothers and me, although he rarely exposed any of the painful memories that he harboured. Sometimes he would tell us the most amazing stories and we would all be transfixed in awe just listening to him, he was a magnificent storyteller. He would tell us stories about World War II and it seemed that, while speaking of these memories, he was set free for just a moment from the shackles that bound him.

My brothers and I would be entranced by the vivid recollections of his sorties across Europe. It was as if a passage opened up before us to see into this man, so we would all keep on asking questions wanting to hear more of his experiences. Slowly, as the humour he'd sprinkled through these recollections started to run thin another door would begin to open up to a room where he locked away the pain from what he had experienced. Dad would then go silent, become uncomfortable and tell us that was enough

for now.

I would like to share with you one of the stories that Dad passed on. He had been stationed somewhere in Greece and his crew was asked to fly a reconnaissance mission, travelling up the coast so they could take pictures of troop movements. As they were coming back they were fired upon by anti-aircraft. This damaged the plane considerably and injured the crew, especially the pilot. Dad, the Bomber Navigator, was the only one who was remotely capable of flying the plane home, so after attending to the crew he took over the controls and managed to get the plane back to the base and land it safely.

The only other part of the story that I recall was that Dad was praised for his bravery and skill in getting the crew back alive. It was my mother who filled in this part of the picture on one occasion, recognising the part Dad had missed. She did this while cradling my father's war-scarred head.

I remember Dad at this point looking extremely embarrassed. For me, it was as if he felt he had done everything in his power to change the course of war but it wasn't enough. It just wasn't enough.

Part 3

Healing

Cycles of Healing

> *While waking up this morning I heard these beautiful little birds chirping away outside my window and peacefulness swept over my whole being. Then I remembered waking up on a morning when I was just three years of age and being snuggled up in my bed at home. There was this big old gum tree right outside my bedroom window and a large flock of starlings lived in this tree. Each morning I would wake up to their chirps and squawks. I found it such a beautiful time of day when I was a young child.*

I DON'T RECALL EVER FEELING AS PEACEFUL AS THIS UPON WAKING AT ANY OTHER TIME IN MY LIFE. It seems from a young age, I'd resigned myself to the possibility of life never feeling this way ever again. However, waking to this memory and feeling gave me hope that finally my life may be changing for the better. As I start to break apart the fortress surrounding my heart, made from the blocks of negative thoughts created around my childhood, I become more accepting of the good parts within me. I have accepted more of 'me'!

I have found that when I've blocked out one painful memory, I've also blocked out whole or parts of other memories that surrounded that moment, good or bad. Memory blocking is not precise. It seems to block out the life memory circulating around and through traumatic moments and the longer the healing of these moments is left, the more of a life it blocks out and affects.

This has led me to believe that my life span of thirty-six years could be viewed like a cross section of the trunk of a thirty-six year old tree. Each growth ring counting as one year, just like it does in nature. It's not linear, it's cyclical – circles within circles. With this in mind, let's reconsider the abuse at age ten, which I decided to blank out of my

consciousness. A ten-year-old tree that has been damaged and scarred will slowly cover its wound to survive in order to protect itself from further damage. In the beginning the damage can be seen on the outside in the bark, then slowly it's covered over. Not so on the inside, as it shows up in the growth rings. It ripples outwards into the years that follow and the tree's growth is affected.

I used to believe that I could block out just one memory and the rest of my life would not be altered or affected. I've grown and changed that belief.

Therapy

The best step forward I can take when I'm over-worked or closed down, antisocial, depressed, anxious, edgy, pissed off at everyone and everything, grumpy, stressed, in constant need of sex, drugs or not being able to sleep or be touched (just to name a few!) is to talk to my counsellor or therapist as soon as possible. I can also warn those whom I care for that I'm being influenced by one or all of the above, but on my way to finding out why. This humble approach is very powerful healing stuff and supports them and me greatly.

A significant amount of my healing has come from my counselling sessions and the gifts that I received from trusting and honouring the counsel of others. In retrospect, it wasn't the method that the therapist used that made my sessions significant; it was the honesty of human expression, rapport and heartfelt concern that acted as the catalyst to turn moments into little miracles.

Counselling

One of my favourite counsellors, Peter, helped me to gain clarity around aspects of my life and assisted me when managing my flashbacks and the waves of emotions that would wash over me and leave me feeling exhausted. He also helped

me place together a regime of visualisations and written affirmations to rebuild my self esteem. This was most helpful as, when I felt myself slipping, it would assist me in maintaining objectivity around my depression, remaining focused on the awareness that the depressions weren't me, they were the effect of the abuse and the acuteness of the trauma that I was reliving.

I arrived at my session with Peter with the intention of exploring the relationships I had with my partner and the man that sexually abused me. I had been having extreme difficulty in having a sexual relationship with my partner. Every time our sexual relationship was discussed I would sink back into myself, feel overwhelmed and turn off – only feeling safe enough to masturbate while fantasising about women that I didn't even know.

I had the intuition that the reason for this shut down towards my partner was once again related to the sexual abuse. So in my next session I set the intention to work directly on my feelings towards my perpetrator, as so far I hadn't felt able to 'dialogue' with him. I found it difficult just to imagine him in the room let alone respond to his imaginary persona. ('Dialoguing', having an imagined conversation with an absent subject, is a widely used therapy technique.)

After I had chosen a place in the room for my imagined partner, I chose a place for my imagined perpetrator to sit as far away from me as possible. The initial verbal response from me to the scenario I set up was, "I will only be sexual, feel sexual, when I am ready, and now when I feel sexual it's too overwhelming for me. I don't want this feeling, especially if someone else instigates it." And the doors stayed shut.

I carried this through to the following session and once again I was asked to place chairs in the counsellor's room to represent my partner and my perpetrator. I found it just as difficult as the previous time to place a chair in the room to represent my perpetrator. I couldn't find a chair that felt correct, or a position for the chair that felt safe for me. As

well as this, I felt a sort of sticky, gluiness between his chair and me.

Taking my attention away from this for the moment, we focused my attention onto dialoguing with the chair that represented where my partner was seated. I began a dialogue with my 'partner' and then moved to the chair that represented her and responded back. As this dialogue progressed it became obvious that I was protecting myself from anything that was going to activate me sexually, as there was a fear of not being able to contain or handle the way I was feeling. It was too much too soon.

At one point my counsellor (now acting as my partner) said to me "I want you to remain hopeful and not give up." With that I started weeping, as I felt that hope was something that I had lost in my life.

Then something extraordinary happened. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the chair that represented the place of my perpetrator. I spun around and with full rage exclaimed, "You are the one that took this from me by fucking me up." I spat the words out with such clear conviction and accuracy as tears streamed down my face.

I yelled out in frustration how horrible it was to feel that I would never regain what was taken from me. I became like a little boy. I withdrew from the dialogue, walked to a corner of the room where there were some pillows, grabbed one, squatted in the corner and sobbed. I felt like I was not able to express myself verbally, I felt like I just couldn't cope.

Then rage against my perpetrator built up again and I screamed out at the top of my voice, "How could you do this to me!?"

Until this session, I had never known how angry I was and how much anger I had been turning back on myself. At least I had finally articulated my rage away from myself and towards the abuser. I came away from the session exhausted; I also came away feeling a lightness and calmness that I hadn't felt before. My load was lifted and I felt more hopeful.

Over the next few weeks I realised that all this was about making inroads – inroads into me, into regaining my lost hope and my peace of mind. Now I see hope as simply the belief in oneself. As one lives always in the present, if I am ever going to believe in myself, I can only do it now.

Healing the Physical Symptoms of Emotional Trauma

When I was about twenty-eight I decided to study Chinese Medicine (this would turn out to be yet another career path that I would not complete). To pay for this course, I worked planting trees at a resort on the east coast of Australia.

About twenty to thirty of us would start planting the trees at six in the morning and our day would end at three in the afternoon. At the end of each day, we were completely covered in dirt and mud and, if that wasn't fun enough, the camaraderie that was shared with the other men was great.

On about the fourth week of planting trees however, I came down with fever and one night when going to the toilet I was shocked to see blood in my urine. Very briskly I took myself off to the hospital, worried my little buddy was going to shrivel up and drop off.

The doctor suggested that I had an infection in my blood but there was no indication of where it had come from, though antibiotics would fix it up in no time. The holistic advice offered to me was to question with whom was it that I was really pissed off, and what had they done that had wounded me deeply enough that I was bleeding?

At the time I was very resistant to viewing my health from an emotional angle, and convinced myself that I just had a bug. For me, taking antibiotics was a much more familiar method of working with sickness.

I got back from the hospital at about two in the morning, took the dose of antibiotics and lay on my bed. Across my mind flashed the thought of the partner who had just left me, taking her children who I missed and loved (although

I had never admitted I love and miss them to myself) with her.

I started to get angry. I was angry that my partner had left me and I was angry with myself because I had instigated it. I began to cry, I felt abandoned, sick, helpless and alone. Then the image of a little boy crossed my mind – me as a two year old with a mother who didn't have any time for me, who had left me all alone, hungry and in need of her love and care.

At this moment I started to scream and punch the bed, I was so angry with my mother. She had never acknowledged my four-year relationship with my ex-partner, telling me that this 'girl' was not for me because she wasn't Australian.

I grew even angrier with myself for cutting off from my partner and her children, and convincing myself to give up what I most cherished in my heart. I wondered if my split from the relationship had been a screwed up attempt to please my mother again! A part of me seemed to believe that, if I showed my mother that I was willing to sacrifice what I most cherished in this world, maybe she would finally love and accept me in return.

I glumly realised how I had let my need for my mother's approval direct the choices I made in life and overshadow my own happiness. I was very distressed, but I knew I had discovered a root cause of my repressed anger and tears streamed down my face as I lay shivering in bed.

Eventually I fell into a deep sleep and on waking, the fever had lifted and my bleeding had ceased. Even though I was fragile and vulnerable, my body had healed and I felt much more peaceful inside.

Not long afterwards I found myself with a strange-looking infection on my foot. I first thought it was a mild case of Athlete's foot and expected a simple treatment and a speedy recovery. My doctor took a swab and sent it to the lab to find out whether it was fungal or bacterial. The results came back and it was apparently neither. The doctor suggested that it

could be a form of psoriasis but that he didn't know how to treat it conventionally. He suggested that I might wish to explore complementary medicines (Homeopathy, Chinese Medicine, Herbs, and Naturopathy etc.)

By this time the infection had spread to cover one third of the top of my left foot. I couldn't wear a sock or shoe as the skin would itch, go red as if sunburnt, crack, peel off and bleed. It constantly wept and each skin-shedding cycle took about three weeks. I kept it hidden, as I felt ashamed about having something so ugly on my body.

Months later, I felt like I'd exhausted every avenue open to me, and nothing was working. I'd changed my diet completely, ingested Chinese herbs, placed herbs on the wound and taken homeopathic remedies, as well as consulting four more medical specialists – all of whom said that they were baffled, and that it could be something I would just have to live with. Diabetes was also considered and ruled out.

Seeing my distress, a friend recommended a book called *Healers on Healing*. The book is a compilation of writings from doctors who are leading the world in their research on recovering from major diseases such as AIDS and cancer.

On more than one occasion, the writers suggested loving your disease and asking it what it represents to you (through meditation and contemplation) – a simple method that some people were using to recover full health.

The doctors couldn't explain why this method worked; they had just observed that it did. Eventually I started to limp, as the skin on my foot would tear apart from being so thin and dry. I became so angry with myself because I couldn't heal this thing.

So I finally decided to take up the meditation recommended in *Healers on Healing*. Every morning and night for four weeks I meditated and sent my foot love. I would imagine waves of love washing over me and this would make me feel at peace, then I would visualise bathing

my foot in this peacefulness. Even though I felt calmer, there was still no change in the health of my foot.

As yet, I still hadn't summoned the courage to ask my foot why it was diseased or what part of me it represented. So, with nothing to lose, during one meditation session I went ahead and asked my foot.

Very loudly and clearly an inner voice or feeling, call it what you want, responded: *I am the part of you that you see as ugly.* (I was so struck by this insight.) *Why on my foot?* I asked myself. *This represents the part of you that wishes to move forward in your life and right now you think you are ugly and shameful and will never be deserving enough to do so.*

I was amazed at how I received this response without hesitation.

I asked one more question: *Why does this look so angry?* At that, a silence fell and a distant image slowly came into focus – the image of my mother. Then words came: *This represents the rage you hold towards your mother.*

I was stunned.

After recovering from the shock of this experiment I thanked myself for the answers and sent my foot love. This ugly part of me I now felt differently towards, it wasn't separate from me any more, it was a part of me that I now loved and accepted.

And guess what? Over the following weeks my wound began to heal. In my meditations I would visualise my foot, not try and change it, just accept it the way it was. Every time I did, I wept tears of sadness over the unhealthy relationship I had with my mother.

As my foot wept, so did I over the love and acceptance that I hadn't received from my mother in the past as her young child, and wasn't receiving in the present as her adult son. When my foot was itchy that represented the part of me that was screaming out to be touched and cared for.

Over the next eight weeks the itching passed, the redness softened into pink new skin, the wound healed, the weeping

ceased and I thanked God for the gifts of good friends, good books, knowledge and perseverance.

Men's Healing Group

> *I have just come back from a men's gathering. It ran over three days and was extremely helpful in assisting me to cope with the uncomfortable feelings and memories that have surfaced lately, and gave me a forum to open up and relate my own experiences with other men. During a discussion group on physical, emotional and sexual abuse we all agreed that the pain, isolation, shame, guilt and hopelessness that was common among abuse victims was present amongst us and that it was our silencing of ourselves that created our isolation and pain. Just to share stories in the midst of others helped our pain leave us. We agreed that a powerful man lives his life with integrity in his personal and professional field, and is brave when faced with what others may think of him as he speaks his truth.*

Another workshop involved a very simple activity: introducing our mothers to the rest of the men in the group. When my turn came I got up and acted out walking my imaginary mother into the room (filled with forty men) and sat her down. When it came to introducing her I felt again this immense anger toward her and could not seem to express it. I decided not to speak at all.

A few minutes passed, still I did not speak – I couldn't speak! I then noticed how I had dropped my head and felt like I was cowering, I had even stopped breathing! This outraged me even further and I just couldn't hold this feeling inside of me any longer; in one great breath I screamed with guttural rage. "I fucking hate you!"

At one point, when I was screaming at the chair that I had pictured Mum in, tears began streaming down my face and I said with such conviction, "When you are real with me

I might decide to talk with you and it will be my choice not yours!"

These words flowed from my mouth like the most powerful poetic verse I had ever heard in my life – and these words were coming from me! They poured from me with such passion. My last words told her to get out of the room and as I imagined her leaving I kicked the chair that I had placed her in.

I felt such sorrow around her not being a nurturing mother, a mother that really wanted me as her son. I walked back to my place in the circle of men and everyone was speechless, some had tears welling in their eyes. I took myself outside and screamed, and I mean screamed! I realised that I had never gotten close to feeling true forgiveness for her treatment of me.

On the last day of the retreat small groups met for the last time. Our group, found a very still spot in front of a fire and we sat down. With arms around each other's shoulders, we listened to how each of us was feeling (not thinking). As we shared, it felt to me as if a net of peace had been cast over us for a sacred moment. We all looked at each other and tears began to well in each other's eyes. Could we have all been feeling the same?

We sat in amazement, bathing in this feeling that we all decided was the gift of grace. We stood up, hugged one another and vowed to remember this feeling next time we met and do our very best to recreate it in our daily lives: just by sharing our inner thoughts, dreams and feelings. Just by opening up that little bit more to others.

So often in my society, I see men shame or ridicule other men who are expressing their emotions, cares and tender thoughts about what they hold as precious. I believe that if we are to heal, we need bravely to put aside our shame and speak openly of the deeds done against us, and those we have done against others. Often both are incredibly similar and linked.

I now feel that the only way to stop a legacy of abuse being passed on is to have the courage not to let guilt and shame win by silencing us further. As men, we have the opportunity to develop as fathers to this world. Our patterns of behaviour will not change unless we speak out honestly and share with each other our experiences, trials and aspirations. We must not let our fear of what society, relatives, peers and elders think of us hinder our creation of a loving brotherhood amongst men.

Dreams

> Seven hundred years ago... People took dreams as seriously as psychiatrists do today.
>
> – T.H.White (1906-1964)

While recovering memories of my abuse I dreamt vividly in relationship to my sexuality. I will share a dream that marked a major turning point in my healing. Dreams often gave me profound insights to work with in my counselling sessions. They were invaluable in the role of informing me of how I was truly feeling. One of these invaluable dreams was as follows:

> *I am observing a past employer of mine. He is sitting on an old wooden chair. He is around 45 years of age with black receding hair and wears black square framed glasses. He has on a short sleeve shirt. My four-year-old daughter is enjoying herself playing on his lap. My heart fills as I become acutely aware of her joyful innocence. He looks at me then smiles and kisses her. I become uneasy. He looks at me once again, smiles lecherously then turns to my daughter, arching her body back; he then opens his mouth and licks her from her naval to her chin. She giggles and laughs innocently not knowing of his agenda. He looks at me again and I am powerless, I cannot move. He is the one with the authority and in control; I have no*

> *power in this situation. I start feeling extreme guilt as he laughs at me. Then I wake up.*

After a few weeks of living with the shame of having a dream such as this, I decided, full of fear, to tell my partner. With her great support, I slowly recognised that the past employer in my dream also looked very much like the abuse perpetrator from primary school. Whilst employed by the man, he had propositioned me sexually on a number of occasions and I felt an attraction toward him that I didn't understand. It was a deep feeling, as if he had something that I had lost but needed badly. Inside of me though, I knew that exploring my attraction to him would not help me regain what I had lost.

I thank my spirit for this. I began to understand that I was betrayed at ten by a man who may have been trying to recapture his own innocence. Innocence that had perhaps been stolen from him by someone else, in the same way mine was stolen. Sharing this dream created a giant leap forward for me. I recognised that I could not dismiss any more the far-reaching impact of my unresolved abuse and its effects on my parenting and family.

Healing Family Bonds and Religious Ties

My Daughter and Partner Speak

I decided to ask my daughter and partner to write their answer to the following question. *What has it been like to live with me while I was working through my abuse?* I believe that to include my family's thoughts is an important part of this story.

Daughter, age thirteen

In order for me to tell you my story of how John's sexual abuse affected my relationship with him, I need to describe our relationship before these moments in his life were looked upon.

"John, come play with us!" my brother and I called and sure enough from around the corner galloped a big playful kid.

John would always play with us even if he were busy. I loved his playful humour; I actually think he taught it to me. John taught me a lot of things like how to swim, how to tie my shoelaces and how to ride a bike. The funniest thing we did was go on adventures and explore the bush, we always had fun together.

"John, I'm going to bed," I called from my snug room. John would come and give me a cuddle and kiss. I would love it, not only at bedtime but all the time; we were good friends. I was happy and felt love cuddling him. We were beginning the path to a very long, fun, emotional and lasting relationship.

A few years passed and one day I heard something I didn't like. "John come play!"

My brother and I called, we waited a while and there was a pause.

"Sorry," he stopped, and taking a deep breath added, I'm too busy."

He felt sad, he felt angry and silently depressed. John still played with us and it was fun, except part of him was missing, broken and incomplete.

Often it would look like tears were in his tired eyes and they needed to be cried. Sometimes I would glance at him out of the corner of my eye and he would not see that I was looking at him. At those times he looked like a little boy that had had a heavy fall and was waiting for someone to help him up, but no one came or understood.

It was his journey and adventure and I knew it would be a long one. I then gradually realised that part of my big playful friend was going to be missing for a while.

Once I sat on the couch watching T.V. "Would you turn that down!" said John harshly.

"Yeah sure," I replied rudely and disrespectfully. I reached for the control and responded to his request.

I'd get home from school and give Mum a kiss and hug,

I'd look at John and my body told me to hug him though in my mind I felt scared. This created a great distance between us. I stopped giving John hugs or kisses. Actually John and I didn't have much physical contact at all, which was a shame because that was something I cherished and admired about our relationship.

John was disappointed that I didn't hug him as much any more and so was I.

After a while I thought, *Alex, you need to understand why you're so uncomfortable with John.*

My answer didn't come straight away. I became aware of John's sexual abuse, though didn't focus consciously on it until recently. I was distant from John because of the sexual abuse and, being perceptive, I could feel John's struggle around it as well. Although John wanted hugs, I observed that he unconsciously felt uncomfortable with them, with his sexuality.

I now know in these harsh circumstances this is what can be expected. It's been three hard years of pain and suffering for John, but John is not the only one that has been hurt by this; his friends and family have all been affected by his abuse.

The saddest thing for me is that our path together had been so full of fun, and was growing into a wonderfully emotional long lasting friendship but this got put off while he worked through the issues relating to his abuse. This meant a lot to both of us and nothing can make up for the amount of heartache this has put us through. I am now so happy that finally John is getting through his past and I thoroughly look forward to our future.

Partner

I am reluctant and somewhat fearful of diving into the deep caverns of what it has been like to have an eleven-year relationship with John. He asked me to write a piece for his book over a year ago. I've pondered many a word in my

mind without ever making a stroke on paper. So here I sit on this warm windy day to write of my feelings and thoughts around sharing eleven years with a man who was sexually interfered with as a boy.

I recognised a deep connection with John from the first moment our eyes danced. My first response was very much of being drawn to him physically and spiritually. It wasn't till many years later that I realised I was bonded to him through pain. In our beginnings we shared deep remembering of soul journeys together in other lives.

We also shared tender and passionate lovemaking. I had never experienced union like this before and yet there was such a distance, such a wall of pain that separated John and I. This pain felt greater than the Berlin Wall. At least the Berlin wall could be touched and torn down brick by brick with the support and encouragement of many others that had shared a common experience.

His journey, my journey, our journey together has been one of dealing with each psychological brick and placing it aside or smashing it to smithereens. It's not an easy journey peeling the onion of pain; there are so many layers seemingly the same yet different. And with each layer there comes a new understanding and a gentler approach to the next challenge.

We both said we would remain together as long as we had work to do; that there was a purpose in us remaining together. As I write these words I think to myself what hard task masters we have been. Now the ideal relationship for me is to have a balanced integration of courageous onion peeling and peaceful surrender into stillness.

In John I saw an amazingly strong man. He had the inner strength to meet heart to heart, along with a Peter Pan quality of fun and spontaneity. There was also intensity and depth in him that felt untouched and unexplored.

At times he would keep his distance and remain separate, never quite letting go enough to surrender into love. I loved

and adored him like I had never loved and adored anyone else. I knew he too held this deep connection. I felt his love for me when he spontaneously allowed his feelings to pour out. And yet if I were to meet him with my own deep feelings for him and return this through a loving look, ice would rise and he would disconnect himself before I could blink. He would then make some humorous quip about nothing, to distract from the moment of intimacy.

I struggled with what John called humour, as for me, this was not humour; it was a roadblock saying, 'don't go any further.' John would behave in this way to repel me from him again and again. From this I would shut down.

There seemed to be a process of asking and reaching out with one hand and snapping back with the other. A clear message of, 'I'm not safe to go there.' This would trigger my own process of abandonment and I would become so full of frustration from the non-verbal communication I would go into a cathartic eruption. I resorted to calling this his 'push me pull you.'

Sometimes I would let this go and other times I would ask him to clarify what he was doing. He would then deny his action as a diversion from intimacy and quickly turn things around to seem like it was my entire problem. It was never our problem to work together on. Often I would end up a blithering screaming banshee totally uncentred, unclear, betrayed, lost and feeling a sense of madness with no light at the end of the tunnel.

We struggled with this intense stuck-ness for three years. It was always there. With the birth of our child and John's realisation of his abuse, we recommitted ourselves to the healing of our wounds and the expression of truth to each other no matter what the feelings. I could feel John's feelings acutely, even though he would deny them. Any calm verbal attempt to rationalise and understand his shut downs would be met with denial by him.

One day we were driving home along a quiet country road. We'd just crossed a little bridge and the car was struggling to gain power up a hill. We came to a standstill and I could not bear to be in the car with him any longer, so I jumped out of the car screaming, "I can't go on with this madness!"

I must say that at all times John remained calm, collected and in complete control of his emotions. I did not get back into the car till he took responsibility for his unsaid, unexplored and denied feelings around love, sex and intimacy.

John would allow himself to only feel fear and sadness. Rage and anger were off limits and these were definitely emotions that he would not belittle himself to explore. Consequently, I was the one that flew into fits of rage and anger.

During those three years I was in my own process that was parallel to John's. It is only now, from a distance, that I can see that my intention to heal developed my 'observer role' – my objectivity.

John and I enjoyed a torrid stint of lovemaking when we first met. I was hungry for him and he represented life to me. He was gorgeous, young, alive, virile and playful. We seemed to be matched and when my children went to their father I would spend time with him.

This period lasted until we moved into a house together which he was very reluctant to do; some part of him must have known that this would set off a process. This was where the 'push me, pull you' first developed. This was also where patterns within our sexual relationship commenced. There would be six-week cycles, we'd make love once and then John would have no interest, he'd turn off and make out that he was too busy.

After six weeks he'd begin to be physically affectionate again and sexually warm, we'd make love then another six weeks would go by. Call me slow, but it took about a year before I decided this didn't work for me. John wouldn't

even allow me to touch him when watching TV or when at the movies. It seemed that when he had his focus directly on something that he was deeply involved with and concentrating on, his response to any physical touch would be one of shock and extreme agitation.

John would tell me that this was due to him wanting to stay immersed in what he was doing. In retrospect, I strongly attribute this response to his sexual abuse. I believe that when John was a young boy sitting on his teacher's knee, happy and safe with having his work checked, something happened. Part of him would be jolted away from his moment of peace by someone he loved.

The overwhelming impact of the sexual touch at such a young age, the absolute feeling of betrayal that unconsciously formed in his lifetime, created an extreme restlessness and agitation in him – especially with touch that he wasn't expecting.

The love and connection John and I shared was great and a year later we conceived our gorgeous child. Inside me (the one John projected his Mother onto) grew a seed planted by him. A child whose gift would be so great that it would guide him back to himself.

He initially felt so overwhelmed by the pregnancy that he put himself on the other side of Australia. He fought overwhelming feelings of entrapment, with nowhere to go and no one on his side. No matter which way he turned, he felt himself dying inside.

It's only in recent times that John has been able to take responsibility for his leaving and admit to himself this is what he felt at the time. He was so ashamed of feeling this way. Knowing this now, he runs to support the expansion into his essence and finds once again his resting place. It's as if he runs to capture it and break away from his feelings of entrapment. He would be overwhelmed by the simplest of things.

"I feel trapped!" This was John's response when he was overwhelmed with feelings. Over time, I recognised that this was his process and was able to stay objective. I would reassure myself he did not feel trapped because of me. From this clear space, I would then supportively and warmly ask, "What do you need to do to get free?"

John's overwhelm would put in an appearance on a daily basis. He would become obsessive with cutting lawns, cleaning bathrooms and kitchens. Every housewife's dream; every partner's nightmare.

When this process began he would withdraw every part of him and no-one would be able to reach him. He would be curt and if I spoke to him his answers would cut like a knife. This was amazingly painful. I would immediately feel that there was something wrong with me, that I wasn't good enough or deserving enough for a gentle look, let alone love. This was the 'push me pull you' again, the 'no win' situation.

So I learned to become abusive and lash out at him to pull him back to relating to me, an abusive pattern. Gradually, I learnt to notice the part I played in this and became conscious of our moment of separation. I'd then step back and take a breath. Refreshed and centred I'd come back and we would define who had the problem, what the problem was and what the person wanted (needed) that had the problem. Simple stuff.

Certainly in this process at times there was blaming. So it was important for me to remain neutral. If I couldn't find neutral then I'd step back for longer. For years when John had a problem, it was so easy for me to be triggered into feeling I wasn't good enough. Subsequently, for a long time not a lot changed. We would chase our tails and I would spiral downward into my own private hell of self-abuse.

Then, one day I found out that hell was not a bottomless pit of pain. On this day, I surrendered control and admitted that "I" could not fix, correct or make better. I reached out and asked for help.

As I lay flat and naked on the rocky ground beneath me, imploringly, I yelled to the black velvet sky, "Dear God I cannot do this, help me!"

The response was stillness. Then the sky began to move and twist and I felt I had become covered in a blanket of stars. I had reached total emptiness and had no will of my own to rise up from the ground.

My body felt heavy, thick, without definition, the ground seemed to swallow me up. "Show me you're there, help me. I will not get up alone."

Have you ever had the experience of your fingers feeling like clumps of wood with your hands and arms being one with the trunk of your body? Your whole body merging with the ground? Well I did and my breath became my only definable connection with me.

Then it happened, a whirring windy noise began in my ears, I felt a vibration rising up from the ground and flowing down from the sky into me. The vibration physically shook my body. My heart felt like it was being split open.

Then as fast as this sensation began, it ceased and the night became perfectly still once again. Love is the only way I can describe how I felt on that night. My whole body felt ecstatic, joyful, unencumbered love. I lay there bathing and breathing in these sensations. I knew my life would never be the same. That at my centre there was a me that was in you, your Mother, my son, my daughters, my dog and even in the lettuce I grew in my garden.

Gently I rose up from lying on the ground and as I did, I felt the warm touch of the earth reach out, solid beneath my feet. I walked mindfully back home and for the first time I had no grief or judgment about my behavioural outburst.

Normally, an outburst would send me into a week or two of self-hate and guilt. Not this time! I was now at peace and I knew that there was a way through this labyrinth. What I had experienced, everyone was capable of. I would no longer try to make things better for John, as this would be denying

John his experience of discovering what was at the bottom of his pit of pain.

My relationship with John, as tumultuous as it was, supported me to find my deeper strengths and tender innocent love for myself. I don't believe that any one person in a relationship or partnership has all the problems. I believe we come into partnership not by accident and it is now my intention for John and I to heal little bits of ourselves each day and expand the celebration of our greater selves by acknowledging the beauty of the mystery within.

My Relationship

> *I feel exhausted by the sheer weight of my life and I just want to go to sleep and wake to find my life has changed. I want to feel at peace. I feel like my relationship is going to end soon because I am holding my partner back and I think she will make the decision soon if I don't.*

Two days after this journal entry I had my first meeting with Peta, a psychologist who works on patterns of dysfunctional behaviour by incorporating both a mainstream and spiritual approach.

In this meeting we spent nearly three hours dealing with the emotional pain that builds up inside of me, and if not expressed causes me to become depressed and possibly suicidal. This meeting led me to look at the raw truth of who I am and the truth of what I have created in my life up to this point – a very fearful man.

Almost every life decision that I have made up to now has been from a central point of fear. I realised that I had been projecting my mother onto my partner and this was one of the fundamental reasons why our relationship came to the point of separation after ten years. Regrettably, this magnified the Mother role within her towards me and then I withdrew even further away from her as my lover and partner. I was not ready to face this, as it would point out

how debilitated a man I was and bring up the unexpressed rage I held towards my mother. So I continued unconsciously starving my partner of physical love and caring.

On one end of our relationship there was me – feeling disgusted with myself that I had been abused and not worthy of receiving or giving any love and physical nurturing. At the other end of the relationship was my partner – yearning to receive love and nurturing from me. What a horrible mess.

When I was a little boy my mother would break my will and punish me by not feeding me or sometimes locking me out of the house in night storms. I was so terrified of the dark, I believed that I must do whatever she told me or she would withdraw 'her love' from me. I believed that my very survival depended on her approval.

With every intimate sexual relationship that I have had this has always been present. I always became anxious when my partner and I didn't see eye to eye. I'd projected the belief onto my partner that she would abandon me if I did not do as she said or disagreed with her. At times I used to believe I would die if my partner and I broke-up.

My Mother's Death

I'd been in Sydney for two days – three days earlier I had received a phone call from one of my sisters to say that Mum was very ill and it might be a good idea for me to come and see her. As it turned out she would pass on within a week.

I had written her a letter not even knowing that she was so ill, it's comforting how things happen that way. I read Mum the letter at her bedside the day before she died. It felt so healing to just sit with her and hold her hand while I read to her. She could barely talk to me she was so weak. Eighty-two years of age.

She at one stage asked me what I did when my mouth was dry. This wasn't like my mum to ask such a question. I answered and told her about sucking on an ice cube or

something of that nature. She asked me if I could get her an orange and cut it up into small pieces so she could suck on them. I went out to her kitchen and a short time later was back with her. She couldn't open her eyes and she couldn't hold the orange, so for the next twenty minutes I sat with her, feeding her orange beside the same bed that Dad slept in before he passed away. I fed her orange like she was a baby.

After feeding her I asked whether she would like to listen to a letter that I wrote to her recently. She said yes, so I sat in her room and read her the following letter whilst stroking her brow and snuggling up to her chubby arm, the arm that I remember snuggling up to and falling asleep upon as a little boy:

> *Dear Mum,*
>
> *Thank you for your letter. I'm sorry that you are not feeling so good and that passing on to your next life isn't as easy as a walk in the park. I'm sure you will enjoy not having people such as myself wanting to get to peace with you, as I am also sure Jesus does not judge either of us for not seeing 'eye to eye' on issues that are a concern to us as individuals. I feel excited for you that you are going on one of the most extraordinary journeys that any person can experience. In some ways I envy you, however this is where my learning is right now.*
>
> *Be extremely content and at peace with the effort that you put into being my Mother. You did the best you could, and when you thought you weren't doing your best I wonder whether you may have felt a little like I do sometimes, alone and helpless with no one to hold me and accept me for not knowing the best way to turn.*
>
> *Know that I hold you and care for you and will do this next time I see you, and you need do nothing to prove yourself worthy of receiving this, nothing.*
>
> *You may be inclined to think that a 37 year old man would not be capable of this, especially a man that you once cared for as a helpless child. Well I am.*

Like you I have chosen wounds that I carry around, you can see the scars, as I can see yours my Mother and some I have turned into gold and these golden scars have created hope and in hope there is a resting place where nothing need be done.

My only wish that I have for us both in the future if needed, is that we give to each other by sharing what created these scars, our frailties (the stories and tears.) As not sharing our pain and stories is what creates the distance between loved ones and friends. When I speak of the future here I am speaking of when I see you in Spirit unless you choose sooner.

I love you dearly Mum and I release you from any chains that bind you to me, and picture you as you may see yourself, standing on top of a magnificent mountain, bathing in God's grace and love, as it falls upon you ever so gently like a passing summer rain, and then, he calls your name.

I will always love you and will see you soon.

John. XOX

Mum fell fast asleep after I read her the letter, telling me that she was very tired. I drove back to my brother's place and slept, spending the next day collecting my feelings and making sure that I didn't squash any during the day. I felt so relieved that she was going and felt excited and peaceful that I had had the opportunity to read her my letter.

That night was very serene, it was one of those beautiful Sydney nights where the air was fresh and the stars were shining. I recall being outside and a cool breeze touched my face with the softness of a baby's hand and I got to thinking; if Mum were going to die, this would be the night to go.

When I spoke with my brother Frank the next day, he mentioned he was learning how to box. His next-door neighbour Jeff, having fought at a professional level, had offered to spar with him and his thirteen-year-old son. Frank showed enthusiasm when speaking of the approach that Jeff had; he saw boxing as an art that was very much a mental game and to be taught through respecting one's opponent.

Anyway, I'd not been home at my brother's place for very long when there was a knock at the door and wouldn't you know it, it was Jeff the boxer at the door looking for my brother, shaven head and built like a brick shithouse. For the next two hours we sipped tea and spoke of philosophy.

At the end of the conversation he said to me, "By the way, could you tell your brother that I'll see him after dinner in the garage for sparring. And John, come along, I promise I won't hurt you."

Now I'm sure I've heard those words before, that's the famous one-liner I heard from my brothers when I was five, before feeling my jaw spin around to the back of my head as I made my way to the canvas of the bedroom floor. There was something about this guy though that I liked and I could tell he was different in some way.

Two hours later my intrigue had got the better of me and I needed to do something other than wait for my mother's death. She was being well taken care of and visiting time was over. So there I was, absolutely petrified as I placed boxing gloves on my hands, readying myself to spar with a professional boxer, while on the other side of town, my mother was drawing her last breaths. It all seemed so bizarre.

As I started to fight, with every block and punch I recalled the pain of being hurt and of hurting others. I remembered how my father would stand by and watch me as I fought my brother who was eighteen months older than I. "Oww," how much I had wanted to be recognised by my dad. If I could just get a punch in, I would be given that soft nod and a "Well done, son." After landing a punch I would look back at my brother and see the pain on his face as he held back his tears. What began as a brotherly game had become another competition for us to gain our father's love and acceptance.

So there I was boxing Jeff and I recognised that as I saw an opening to punch, I resisted putting all my effort into it; I just didn't want to succeed in connecting my punches.

Jeff stopped the sparring and asked, "Why aren't you following through?"

I thought about it and realised that I had figured out at a young age that my success meant that others got hurt. I didn't want that burden, so I simply stopped myself achieving and have carried this mistaken belief with me into my adult life. Another belief to re-write.

I took a break from the boxing, walked out of the garage and looked out into the clear night sky. I thought about my mother and knew at that moment, that something had happened. Jeff and I resumed sparring and once again every time I saw an opening I hesitated and lost my focus and strength. I thought to myself, 'I'm going to change the beliefs I've adopted around being successful because this is really affecting my life.'

Not long after, my sister-in-law walked quietly into the garage and told us that Mum had passed on a short time ago. As far as funerals go, Mum's funeral went well, everyone who knew Mum was there and it was a great farewell for the most part. It seems the area of her life that she most excelled in was her involvement with the Church. Everyone who knew her socially had something wonderful to say about her.

So there I was in the church trying to get in touch with how I felt about my mother. At one point during the ceremony I began to feel an immense pressure in my chest and emotion rose up in me. I became caught between sorrow and rage, I wanted to cry out at the top of my voice how unloving, cruel and manipulative she often was with her children, with me! I wanted to grieve the loss of *all* things about her. I found it almost unbearable to stand there and listen to only half the truth. How can a person grieve fully for a loved one when only half of her is being represented at the time of mourning?

Seeing Mum's body was a great relief for me, as it didn't have the impact I thought it might. Her face had relaxed and she looked much younger. I guess she would have liked that. I didn't really know her, who she was I mean, although after

her death I found out that above all she had wanted to be a ballerina.

Hearts and Dreams

I believe my mother and father became bitter and twisted inside because they didn't follow their hearts and dreams. It seems Mum was asked to train with a famous Russian ballet teacher and Dad was offered the position of navigator on the Prime Minister of England's plane. One of my sisters at seventeen wanted to be a dress designer and this was her dream above all things. But Mother told her that there was no future in this and convinced her to become a nurse. She stayed with nursing for a few years and then became sick with poliomyelitis. After almost a full recovery, she worked in my parent's fabric shop. She told me this when she was forty years of age as she sobbed by my side.

It's my belief that bitterness can form from not following one's dreams and this can turn into blame and resentment towards anyone who does. Our children are overflowing with short and long-term dreams. Their dreams can stay alive – they stay alive through us believing in them, affirming them. What is there to lose?

My Daughter

> *I have become so intolerant of everyone's personality and I'm noticing how excessively I'm bitching about how false and fake everyone is. I'm becoming reclusive and cut off again. I'm not willing to look at how false and fake I have become, even if it is to protect myself. I thought I was always real. When people talk to me now who are coming from a loving place, I become threatened and confused and want to verbally attack them. I caught myself doing this the other day with my loving five-year-old daughter. I feel so ashamed.*

Most of the time without any problem my daughter knows she is lovable. In fact, she is love, how beautiful is that! Because she is so often a reflection of where I came from, I at times catch myself feeling jealous of who she is.

This activates a hidden part in me that wants to break her spirit and destroy her will, to make her fearful and forget who she really is. In effect this is the same way that I was destroyed and forgot who I truly was.

I feel so deeply ashamed upon writing this, even though the realisation gives me a choice.

These are lyrics from a song that I wrote for my daughter before she was born. Her middle name is Hope.

House of Hope

Looking at a man made life, touched by the coming of new life.
Impressions of innocent hands, cupping my face I see.
The letting go of mothers and sons, pain of the play so deep.
Fathers to men become one. I shade my eyes to the life I see.

Thinking about my baby and my wife, bringing to me a new life,
joys of my life rain down, open my eyes to the light I see.
I want to hold my grace, step to the pace, all my hopes bonded
so close, like a baby's calm and saving grace. In the house of hope,
I want to write my name on the walls.

In the house of peace, where my sculptures stand so tall.
I want to write, write my name, I can hear my name being called.
I will write, write my name, I hear it echo off these walls.

Fixing my gaze held in high esteem, seeing me as she believes,
my little baby cries, and, on raising my eyes,
there's a path back to me.

My active participation in my daughter's early life triggered the sadness and pain I had been carrying with me from my own childhood. I wanted to rid myself of my pain by attempting to destroy anything around me that reminded me of my trauma. I became jealous of her, as she still had her will and loving spirit. I became acutely aware of the

bitterness living inside me.

I now know that I must have compassion for myself, and forgive myself, for within my daughter lies the key to remembering the truth about who I really am. I just need to take the time to learn from and nurture her free spirit, and rediscover my own in the process.

On occasions I'm still confronted with the urge to squash her spirit and my shame around this urge existing in me makes me feel so monstrous and worthless. Although it is painfully difficult to admit, keeping this urge a secret is the worst thing I can do. The silent shame blocks me from gaining insight into new ways to strengthen my daughter's spirit and my own. Shame isolates and binds me within my own private hell – the only hell that I believe exists. *Shame holds us in a contract to repeat the past.*

This is the legacy of my ancestors, their Church, schooling and religion, and now mine. My Church upbringing made me, like so many others, a victim of the system. A system designed to keep victims and perpetrators of spiritual, sexual, physical or emotional abuse silenced. Right or wrong, you kept silent. Shame and guilt around sexual pleasure is still widely spread in this religion, natural loving urges are considered perverted.

I was raised on the belief that sex was dirty, wrong and sinful, as were any thoughts around these areas. Even up until my last year of school, we were told that playing with ourselves was wrong and took our minds off God. As sexuality is such a large part of the human experience, to make this wrong and the work of the devil created a large imbalance within me.

My teachers largely denied and repressed their sexuality and were extremely awkward when expressing any love and caring through physical touch. Any nurturing by a member of the Church order quite possibly had sexual overtones; hyper-arousal wasn't uncommon amongst the clergy and brothers.

For some their suppressed sexual creativity distorted their delivery of corporal punishment as well, to the point where it became sadistic violent abuse. At ten, my sexuality had been opened up and tampered with well before its time. A man that represented Christ had betrayed me; how could I now trust my perception of who Christ was? Christ supposedly loved and protected children as well, but he didn't protect me!

Stillness

In our family, I remember that being still and at peace meant the opposite of sitting with God. It was assumed you were planning evil things. An idle mind could be used by the devil.

How little I was taught about inner beauty, self love, care and respect for others and the greatest gift that one could pass on to any loving child – how to stay connected to the light of God within, our true resting place and home. I guess people can't teach what they don't know.

An Absent God

From a very early age I was influenced into believing that a loving Father/God existed in a place outside of myself and far, far away, in a place called Heaven. The stories were numerous and they all had the same underlying theme running through them; God was outside myself, loved me from a distance and I would only meet Him when I died. The afterlife was the only time I could possibly expect to receive unlimited love, nurturing, joy and perfection. The only time that I would truly 'Rest in Peace.'

Believing that the Creator who made me was somewhere other than within me, sent me into confusion. I relied on the outside world to define me, dismissing my inner voice and intuition as irrelevant. I looked to others to tell me who I was, creating a great need to be accepted by those around me.

Since I didn't receive the acknowledgement and acceptance from my parents and teachers for who I truly was, I acted negatively to gain attention. I was continuously told I was a naughty, evil and wicked boy. I was told I had the devil in me. I started to believe I was no good in my heart. At Church and school, I was taught that priests were holy men who received knowledge directly from God. My relationship with God was not direct, but must be mediated and defined by these men and their rules.

I believe the power that is apportioned to the belief in a male God that lives separate, somewhere other than within the hearts of all humankind, continues to promote a society of men and women who are in a perpetual search for their absent fathers. Endlessly seeking love where it can never be found.

My dad was an absent father as I'm sure his father was before him. I am an absent father sometimes, too, but I'm trying to break the cycle. I am discovering the divine essence within me, the healing powers of self-acceptance and love, and I'm doing my best to teach my daughter to do the same.

Through actively caring for and empowering our children we heal our own inner-child. Our children need us, and we need them. I want a new theme to flow, where we recognise and affirm each other's unique beauty and potential. Acknowledging that we are complete and magnificent works of art formed by a loving Creator that resides within us all – that we are one and the same through divine order. Providence.

Part 4

Disclosing Abuse

Silencing Stories of Abuse

I BELIEVE THAT SILENCING DISCLOSURES OF ABUSIVE EVENTS IN ANY WAY KEEPS GUILT AND SHAME CONNECTED TO THEM, which fuels the repetition of these acts within our communities. It also supports educational bodies' resistance to using preventive measures that help stop abuse.

Any person's or organisation's suppression of an individual's abuse ultimately condones it. This promotes victims seeing themselves as powerless when endeavouring to remove the hand held over their mouths. It leaves them living in shame. Keep in mind here that the subject is the nurturing of the human spirit.

The Letter

At thirty-three I was ready to begin my healing process, wanting to commence counselling to heal the trauma of sexual abuse, and recommence my vocational studies in psychotherapy. However, living in an isolated township distanced me from the resources I needed to achieve these goals, so I decided to move to a larger town where I could immerse myself in a more healing-dedicated environment. I wanted to participate in a group of sexual abuse survivors, to meet other men who had similar experiences to mine. I wanted to learn how they survived.

It seemed that a practical way for me to fund the move to the city to engage in intensive therapy was to notify the Church of my abuse and request financial assistance on my path to recovery. At the stage of writing the letter explaining my situation, I hadn't yet sought any legal advice and certainly had little idea of what I was getting myself into. However, I was aware of a document compiled by Bishops

and leaders of religious institutes within Australia and released in December 1996. This document was designed to outline the procedure that religious orders would adopt while responding to claims of sexual abuse placed upon them.

With much uncertainty, I naively wrote the following letter:

> *Dear Sir,*
>
> *Between 1971 & 1978 I was a pupil at a Church school. When I was 10 years of age I am ashamed to write that a teacher under your employ sexually assaulted me and in my high school years I was physically, emotionally and psychologically abused.*
>
> *This is an extremely difficult matter for me to write about, the most difficult letter that I have ever written in such an unstable framework, not knowing the response I will receive.*
>
> *The following matters of abuse should not have gone undetected within my schooling. In 1972 I was ten years of age and in 6th class, my teacher was Mr. Smitts. The teacher would ask me, while his class was being run to sit on his lap, at his desk, in his classroom. Then he would place his hand down my pants. I was one of several boys he would abuse, and he did this on numerous occasions to me.*
>
> *Between the years 1976 &1978 my teacher a Mr. Rollo, (his nickname "Basher" because of the way he would psychologically punish certain boys during his class period) at times would spend up to 30 min. walking me around the school threatening me with dismissal or suspension.*
>
> *During this time he would also tell me that I would never make it and that I was hopeless, worthless, and that he was going to beat me. He would take me to other teachers, interrupt their classes and ridicule me in front of the other teachers and students. He would then cane me. He did this to others as well.*
>
> *I believe both these teachers were employed to pro-*

tect me, build up my self worth and prepare me mentally for the outside world. The events that I was involved in with both these teachers still torment my mind and unfortunately still determine decisions I make in my daily life, decisions about my self that I should not be making. Sadly these events have affected my well being.

I want this to be known to you, so these two teachers, wherever they are, are not still conducting these abusive acts. For my children, my family and others that have been affected wrongfully by their Church schooling I wish to complete my studies in psychotherapy, so I can heal the sexual abuse and psychological scarring that has occurred within me.

My objective then is to create a programme to help others commence healing the dysfunctional attitudes and pain within their own lives, and reduces these experiences being passed on to our children.

I'm sure you are aware that the figures of sexual abuse are forever increasing. I myself want to become more functional within society and in my family. The memories of my abuse have weighed on my conscious mind for long enough.

I would prefer this matter to be resolved outside of the court system and I suggest the following manner. The training Institute that I wish to complete my study at is in Brisbane. I wish to move to Brisbane this year to complete my research and study over the next 3 years.

I want your organisation to fund this project. From me healing this trauma, completing my studies and receiving accreditation I will endeavour to:

Set up my own private practice as a counsellor and therapist, focusing on supporting victims that have experienced abuse in Church schools in their recovery.

Set up therapy groups for men who have been abused within the Church school system, this will include working with the perpetrators as well.

Work with teenage boys to build their self esteem and self worth within the school system and pass on to them a mentoring programme that I have designed

and given a great deal of thought to, and work with Teachers, Fathers & Sons in a combined programme.

I believe the setting up of these programmes will, in the long run, minimise the compensation claims that will inevitably be brought against the Church schooling system and the Church within the years that follow. For people's faith to be re-established with the Church and educational system it must be seen that this establishment is willing to go the distance.

I wish to discuss this matter more fully and am willing not to let this matter go any further till the 8/2/97. I look forward to your quick response to this urgent matter.

Sincerely

John Saunders.

At the time of writing this I had not realised the legal ramifications of submitting a compensation request, nor yet the depth of damage that the abuse had created in my life. Nevertheless, I cannot tell you the relief that washed over me when I posted this letter away, it was as though all the traffic noise around me went quiet and everything stilled as I placed the letter into the post box. I believe it had something to do with me acknowledging that I was abused through writing it down and facing it. I received two letters in response to mine.

The first letter was to arrange a meeting to compile a record and summation of my abuse with the school's religious governing body. The second letter scheduled another meeting for March with a representative of the school that I had attended.

Following is the official summary of the first meeting, with the school's religious governing body:

John Saunders reports that he had been repeatedly sexually abused by Mr. Smitts, a teacher in our School. These abuses repeatedly took place, some-

times as often as twice a week in a manner as outlined in John's letter.

The abuse took place during 1972 when John was in sixth class primary. John reported that there were three other boys who used to get on the teacher's lap. He is not aware if they were sexually abused but he suspects so.

A couple of years later while in secondary school, one of the boys pointed at him and said that John was one of the boys who got on the teacher's lap. John reminded him that he was also one of the boys, which sent the boy very quiet. John has a recollection of going on a retreat that year of 1972.

The teacher invited him to spend some time alone with him that night. He believes that he was saved by the invitation of another boy to engage in some other activity. He remembers the teacher being very annoyed when he came back from that activity. John reported that he never said anything to anybody.

He is the youngest of nine children and he never said anything to any of his family. He never said anything to any school authority. As far as he knows, none of the other boys said anything about it to anyone.

John said that over the last year he has had a developing awareness of what has happened to him. He is aware that he has found it very difficult to trust other males. He has always seen himself as inferior to other males. He has tended to isolate himself from others. He has experienced lots of depression bouts and has really had to pull himself up from that on many occasions. Sexually, he can be like a cold fish and finds himself turning off sexually in a split second without any apparent explanation.

The whole memory of the sexual abuse began to come back to him a couple of years ago and he simply did not know how to deal with it. John said that when he left school he went into retailing work

but found himself moving from job to job every six months or so.

The longest he held a position for was about eighteen months. John reported that he had been having dreams about school. He dreamt about being bullied and abused at school. These dreams began to subside at about age twenty-eight which was around the time that he started to consciously remember the abuse and began to verbalise it.

John said that he has not sought professional help and counselling previously apart from one attempt. This therapist threw the whole responsibility for the abuse back on John when he admitted to the counsellor that he had some enjoyment from the abuse by the teacher. He terminated the sessions with the counsellor.

The physical and emotional abuse he received from Mr. Rollo at the secondary school is of great concern to John. He believes that it has contributed significantly to his instability and needs to be seriously looked at. This teacher used to take him from the classroom and parade him around other classrooms humiliating him in front of these classrooms. This was in spite of other teachers telling him to get back to his own class. This teacher would threaten to humiliate him in front of his parents.

In the end he was told to leave him alone by the Vice-Principal of the school. That happened when John was in Year 12, his final year of school.

John was advised that he had the right to go to the police and report the matter of the alleged sexual abuse. John replied with emotion that he still feels guilt about what had happened and had not yet come beyond blaming himself about what had happened. He did not want to become the abuser of the perpetrator by reporting him.

John reported that he just wants to heal himself. Again the offer was made to John about going to the police with his complaints. Both representatives

> for the Church offered to accompany John in going to the police and support him as he made his complaint. John expressed his appreciation for this offer.
>
> At this stage he does not wish to go to the police but would think about that for a few days or so and maybe contact both representatives to accompany him to the police if he decided to do so.

The Meeting from my Experience

As the meeting unfolded and I was asked to recall the events that took place, I started to feel very threatened and uncomfortable. After all, the two men that were taking the summation (even though extremely supportive of me while carrying out the procedure and showing a great deal of compassion) represented the institution where my abuse originated, the Church education system.

One of the final questions I was asked was how I felt the abuse had affected me in my life? I hung my head and wept uncontrollably as I struggled to find the words to answer this question.

With the interview over, one of the priests mentioned that he found it interesting that the year my sexual abuse took place was the final year my perpetrator taught in the Church education system. When the perpetrator's employment was terminated there was no reason given as to why he was dismissed. The priest said, in most cases, a reason is given.

After the interview I walked outside and rain had just begun to fall. I felt like I had just been knocked over by a bus; I was physically aching and mentally exhausted. This two-hour meeting took me days to recover from. But I was extremely grateful for the way this process was managed as it gave me the first opportunity to speak of my abuse to the people who represented the organization that it had originated from, and they had believed me. I could feel the healing process was underway.

The March Meeting

It was now March and time for my meeting with the representative of the Church school that I had attended. I invited him around to my house and I recall how nervous I was before he arrived; I think he was nervous as well.

The meeting was extremely casual, and he didn't mention the sexual abuse; his primary concern was to find out how I was coping. He was curious about the bullying that occurred when I was in high school and became noticeably annoyed and uncomfortable with my recollection of this occurrence; it seemed as if this behaviour disgusted him more so than the sexual abuse.

When we discussed the compensation request I had mentioned in my letter, he stated very clearly that the Church would not be at all interested in settling outside legal procedures, as they could be seen as trying to cover up the incident. The matter, he was sure, needed to be settled in a legally binding way. I agreed; however I was confused because I had been told by certain representatives of the Church that they were open to settling the matter outside of the legal system.

It seemed curious to me that there were two different camps. The school representative advised that I find a solicitor and proceed with claiming compensation through legal channels. I would be suing the Church because the school that I attended was a systemic school under the Church's authority, the teacher (perpetrator) being under their employ.

I asked him again about the compensation possibilities I had mentioned in my letter, and whether he thought it was an unrealistic request. I recall he smiled at that, and said that from his involvement in these matters, yes it was unrealistic.

I walked him out to his car and on leaving, with heart-felt concern, he acknowledged my courage to come forward and speak of this matter and added that if I wanted to speak with him again, not to hesitate.

I was so moved that as he left, I started to cry. Once again I felt overwhelmed by the experience of someone who represented the organization where my abuse occurred telling me how courageous and brave I was – acknowledgements I had never received in my school days.

The Police Statement

The sooner one gives a statement to the police, the faster the compensation process gets underway. The police system generally revolves around claims that can be legitimised or substantiated by other people's statements and it takes time for people willing to make statements to be found.

I prolonged my case because I gave my statement to the police three months after writing of my abuse to the Church office. I should have given my statement to the police as the first step in the process. I impulsively went alone on the morning I decided to make my statement to the police, because I wanted to get it over and done with, as I felt deeply ashamed. I was also feeling that if I kept silent now I might never speak of these events again. I found making my statement by myself and without emotional support was extremely uncomfortable. I constantly went blank due to the overwhelming emotions and memories.

Fortunately the police representative was extremely supportive. Making a statement is all about specific events: when, where, who, what and how. When did it occur? What time of day or night was it? Where was the place? What was familiar in this place? What were you wearing? In my case, some of the questions were: Where was my desk situated? Which direction did the building face? Where was the door? Where was the teacher's desk? Were there many windows? Who was there? What was said? What happened?

I needed to answer all the questions as accurately as possible, without saying anything that was an assumption. I was also asked to draw a picture of the room where I was abused.

After I gave my statement, the policeman suggested I take a copy home with me to read and if there was anything I wanted to change, omit or add, to do so. I took my statement home, and read it over and over again. I couldn't believe that what I was reading had happened to me.

After resting with what I had written and adding some changes to make it more accurate, I went back to the police station to sign the final statement. This was then sent to the investigation unit set up to deal with these cases.

The Experience of Making the Statement

The policeman who took my statement suggested I be as patient as possible, and that I should contact him if I had any more concerns. I commend him for his support. I found that speaking of my abuse to people in authority, who incidentally were moved to tears by my recollections, had an amazingly healing effect on me.

These people were contradicting a deep belief that I was carrying – that people in authority hurt you instead of helped you. One may choose to go through this procedure with full support from their counsellor. This is a good choice, as making an official statement can be a beneficial way of processing abuse and may aid one in recovering memories still concealed.

I found that making the statement helped me anchor the reality of my abuse through the detailed recollection of specific events. It is very important that counsellors and carers support victims/survivors to recall what truly happened and assist them to rebuild their own memory of events without any prompting or provocation. If counsellors and carers do not offer this support it their actions can legally be viewed as leading a victim/survivor into a false memory. Because a person may easily feel overpowered or interrogated whilst talking of their abuse, it is very important that the statement is given to someone who is

trained and experienced in taking statements from sexual abuse survivors.

When contacting the police to make an appointment, I advise you to make sure that the police station can provide this specialised service. If they cannot, ask them where the closest police station is that can. You may find that they will bring someone in specifically who is qualified to take statements such as these.

Take as much time as you want when giving your statement; remember you are not under any obligation to finish it and they will not commence the investigation until you give them the go-ahead. As I mentioned earlier, after you have given your statement, the police representative will offer you a copy to take away with you. If they do not offer this then request it, as it is very important that it is as accurate as possible.

Once you have signed and handed your statement to the police they will act on your behalf, with you as a witness in your claim. In Australia, there will be no cost to you of having the police act of your behalf. I have nothing other than high regard and respect for the policemen that were involved in the taking of my statement and the investigation of my claim. I was amazed at the sensitivity that was shown to me by the policeman that took my statement. At one stage I mentioned to him that I was feeling extremely guilty around making this statement against a person who would now be an old man. He reminded me that I was ten years of age at the time and if a ten-year-old boy came to me today and told me the story that I had just told, would I want him to feel guilty? Would I silence him?

Providing my statement was confusing for me as I would 'space out' and forget where I was up to at different points of the recollection. The policeman would then gently help me focus by reading back to me what I had just said and ask me to begin again in my own time.

I remember at one point I felt extreme gratitude for the policeman, then, over the top of this loving thought I had the

urge to place my hand between his legs and fondle him the same way the perpetrator had done to me.

It was as if I wanted to somehow destroy and take back the innocence that had been taken from me so long ago. I was betraying the moment of this man's innocent display of tenderness, caring and trust, in the same way that I was betrayed. I sat there full of shame for what I had let happen to me as a young boy, and disgust at my present impulse towards this caring policeman.

Help Guide for Preparing to Make an Official Statement

This exercise will help you prepare making your official police statement. Discuss with your counsellor whether the steps I have outlined are an appropriate exercise for you. Most importantly, in following these steps, take it *slowly* and be *very gentle* with yourself:

1. Recall and describe the clothes that you wore at the time.

2. Write down the name and description of the perpetrator; what he or she looked like; hair colour, height, type of clothing worn, nationality or any other distinguishing characteristics.

3. Describe in as much detail as possible the environment where the abuse occurred; was it inside or outside? What was the address, type of house or building (multi-story, single-story), what was the location? e.g. school yard, hall, bedroom, library, park, car etc.

4. Describe the configuration of the room in which the abuse took place, e.g. were there tables, chairs, beds, windows and pictures or ornaments etc. Where were they situated? Draw a floor plan.

5. As gently as possible, recall a specific abusive event that took place and describe this in as much detail as possible in writing, e.g. verbal communications, specific actions that took place, the way that you were abused. What was

the date? The time of day?

6. Repeat step 5 as many times as you need to feel comfortable with this recollection.

7. Write down the names of any others that you believe were molested or that saw you being molested. Keep in mind that any people who you name in your statement may be contacted and asked to give a statement in regard to claims you make in yours. They may also be asked to appear in court.

8. Write down when you first recalled your abuse. What situation triggered your memory? (There may have been a period of time you had a loss of awareness of your abuse).

9. Write briefly, if possible, on how you believe the memory of your abuse has affected your life.

If you find, at any stage, that doing this exercise is too distressing, take time out to talk this through with your counsellor or support person; after all, this is a task that requires a tremendous amount of resilience, courage and effort.

Advice for Managing Stress When Making a Statement

1. Organise someone else to drive you to and from the police station, take a bus, or ask the police to drive you to and from your home.

2. How much you recall of your abuse may depend on how traumatised you are by it. So I suggest before you even think of making a statement to the police, place aside some time to sit down with your therapist or counsellor and focus on one clear incident that you recall, and write around this. Therefore, when you go to record your statement with the police, you are clear about what you want to write. As distressing as this may be, it will help desensitise you about making a statement to the police, and minimise the time it takes to make the statement. More importantly, it will help you in your recovery from the abuse.

3. I suggest you have a support person accompany you while you go through the process of making your statement.

4. When you ring up to make an appointment at your local police station, make sure they place you in contact with the Sexual Assault Division. If they do not have a Sexual Assault Liaison Officer, ask them to arrange one for you.

5. Speak to your counsellor about making a statement, and ask him or her to help make the arrangements and for them to be present when you make your statement.

6. Organise a session with your counsellor as soon as possible after you make your statement.

7. If you are open to physical touch (and I understand you may not be), get a massage after making your statement. I found this extremely healing and comforting because my body started physically aching after recounting the events. Also choose someone who is very aware of your situation and you know well and trust.

8. Take the following day off work, or better still, organise your meeting with the police when you know you have the following few days off.

9. If you are in a men's group, or sexual assault support group, make your statement prior to a group meeting so that you can receive support from the group when you attend. Notify the group of your intention to do this so that they can be prepared.

10. Accept the possibility that as more memories surface an additional statement may be required.

The Investigation

A little over three months went by before I received my first phone call from the policeman investigating the claims made in my statement. He introduced himself and said that he had been investigating similar claims over the last few years, and he asked if it would it be okay if he contacted me from time to time to answer certain questions. I said yes, and with that we ended our phone conversation.

After this phone call I began feeling a familiar anxiousness rise up in my belly and my legs started aching and going weak under me. I went for one of my long runs, as I have

found this a great way to release the heaviness and stuck emotions locked inside me. During the run I realised that my legs wanted to kick, kick my perpetrator away and get him off me.

Two days went by and I received another phone call from the policeman. Once again speaking very gently to me, he mentioned that he had just been in contact with one of the men that I saw sitting on the teacher's lap. He said that this man was willing to come in and make a statement saying that he saw me sitting on his lap as well. He explained to me that claims such as these were extremely difficult to substantiate, especially when they happened so many years ago. People were either untraceable, had passed away or preferred not to remember, or if they did, didn't want to be involved.

He was very pleased with his find. I said that if he wanted to give the other man my contact number, I'd be happy for him to call, as I would really like to thank him for what he was doing.

Four days later, I received a phone call from a person that I hadn't talked to for eighteen years. I couldn't thank him enough as he had just made his statement confirming my story and confirming that he too had been abused by this teacher.

After the call I walked into the kitchen where my partner was and began to cry as I told her what had just been confirmed. I didn't know until that moment how much I had wanted to believe that it didn't really happen. Part of me would have been happier to find out that the whole thing was a fantasy, so I wouldn't have to deal the reality of what had actually occurred.

The policeman's commitment to following up on the information was extraordinary and the sensitivity that he displayed relaying information back to me has helped rebuild my faith and trust in men.

In the next two weeks, three other class members would give their statements in regard to what they experienced and observed. In the weeks that followed, others would be contacted. Every time I was told that another man was making a statement confirming that he saw me being abused, it was like recovering a lost memory. At last, after twenty-six years, the truth was going to be told.

Attempts to Settle Out of Court

At this stage I was hoping there might still be a way to receive compensation without solicitors being involved until the very end of the negotiations, when the necessary legally binding documents needed to be placed together and signed. I decided to contact the 'Broken Rites Group' in Australia. This is an organisation that has been set up to support victims of sexual abuse by religious representatives and compile information on all matters relating to this area.

This organisation provided great support to me. They suggested I contact the Executive Officer for the Church's *National Committee for Professional Standards.* This was the key person who had placed together the Church's national protocols document regarding sexual abuse cases and the contact for information if I wished to receive compensation without the lengthy and costly involvement of solicitors.

I spoke with the contact the following day very candidly about what point I was up to in regard to legal proceedings. I told him that I had completed the summary of my abuse for the Church with their representatives, had an interview with the representative of the Church order whose school I went to, and had given my statement to the police.

He was very supportive of me seeking compensation in the manner I was requesting, out of court, and added that there should not be any resistance to proceeding in this fashion.

I also contacted the Professional Standards Association

set up by the Church and spoke with the ombudsman. The ombudsman was also under the impression that there would not be any problem proceeding in the manner that I wished. I felt as if I had just had a huge weight taken off my shoulders and commenced compiling the documentation that I had to submit to the Professional Standards Association via the ombudsman.

However, after presenting my case to the Professional Standards Committee, the ombudsman let me know that the committee wasn't sure whether they wanted to proceed in this fashion after all. They were, however, interested in me disclosing to them how I arrived at my compensation figure plus any other thoughts that I might have regarding this matter.

The ombudsman warned me that the time frames that I hoped for would not be possible to adhere to and that the process that I wanted to follow could be long and drawn out. I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach on realising that I would have to use solicitors and deal with the courts and the legal system.

A few months passed and I received a phone call from the Head of the Church in Australia. He confirmed apologetically that an out-of-court settlement was unrealistic; standard legal procedures needed to be followed. He also added in the same conversation that, even though the Church's national protocols document (placed together by bishops and leaders of the Church in Australia) was well meaning, it was not a document in which all suggestions could be practically applied.

I had gotten my hopes up and put a lot of energy into following this path; now I felt depressed and despondent. Needing the funds to pay for one or two counselling sessions a week, at $60–$160 a session, made my life even more stressful. The effect that all my pent up anger and confused emotion was having on my parenting was extremely obvious and threatened to damage my family's well being.

With my immediate family relationships stretched to breaking point, I had to do something. I decided to find out whether the Church would assist me financially to pay for my counselling fees. I contacted the Church once again and the representative said that he didn't see any difficulty in this, though again the procedure could be lengthy. It took some time to find a therapist in my area familiar with the trauma of sexual abuse.

Fortunately, I found a therapist who was willing to counsel me without receiving any payments until I was compensated or could afford his fees. All the others requested payment straight away but this man was willing to wait. This therapist literally saved my life. The Church did eventually assist me financially and I was able to build my strength psychologically and prepare for the courts.

The Lawyers

I wish I could write that I was satisfied with the professional conduct of the law firm that I chose to take on my case. The truth is I was appalled. In hindsight, it would have been wiser to contact more lawyers and review them more thoroughly before making a choice. Thankfully, not all law firms are the same.

Therefore, to counter the initial stress associated with seeking a law firm, I recommend, if you haven't done so already, that you seek support through counselling or therapy sessions. The litigation process can be at times extremely stressful and exhausting. Childhood sexual abuse has been one of the most difficult memories I've ever recalled, and the stress is amplified by the fact that it is required by law to recall these events in specific detail.

Therapy helped me handle this pressure and supported me to break down the many psychological barriers I had put in place to cover up the painful memories. Through

perseverance, what naturally followed for me was addressing the other harmful patterns repeating through my life that stemmed from this initial trauma. This included facing the fact that I loathed myself for long periods of time in my life.

In my experience, when one loathes oneself, positive self-regard is impossible. As I grew older, no matter what age or social stage I was at, when it came to loving myself I made some awful choices that hurt others and myself. Through close and non-judgmental observation, I finally saw the thread of destructive choices and their origin. That was my breakthrough.

With this knowledge and through the practice of self-compassion, I found my way to make positive change. I wish I had faced these events sooner. When memories revisit me now, I am far better equipped to cope with them and make better choices.

I contacted a reputable law firm to discuss my case. As I said earlier, I wish I had put some time into researching the firm first and finding a lawyer who was more competent and emotionally supportive. After conversing for approximately one minute the solicitor said that he understood that these matters were 'sensitive' but asked if I would I give him the details of what happened to me. After I gave him the details he asked me to send him copies of all correspondence that I had entered into with the Church and the statement that I made to the police. I did this and they phoned me back a short time later telling me that they would be interested in taking on my case and that the first thing to do was to file a Victim's Compensation Claim (V.C.C.).

Before they could proceed, they required me to undergo a psychiatric evaluation to ascertain the severity of my condition and they suggested a psychiatrist in Sydney who was familiar with cases such as mine. They would need this evaluation to support my claim, and the Church solicitors would require me to have an additional one with their psychiatrist as well.

I mentioned to him the difficulty in raising the funds required for the psychiatric evaluation at such short notice and asked whether they had a 'disbursement fund' to cover such costs (a disbursement fund is an account set up by your solicitor to pay for any costs incurred by you, and on completion of your claim these costs are deducted from your overall compensation figure). Unfortunately they did not offer such a service, however, he assured me that there would be no trouble with me paying half the amount on the appointment date and paying off the rest. He said he would organise this with the psychiatrist.

I felt relieved by the arrangement. He stated he would send me a letter of confirmation regarding my appointment with the psychiatrist by the end of the week. We also discussed the beatings and ridicule that I received during my schooling in detail. He said to me that such disciplinary practices were not uncommon for those times, and even though it was horrendous, it was not a criminal offence, and therefore I could not seek compensation for it.

Our phone call ended and I became depressed and suicidal. Once again I thought I was robust enough to speak of the abusive events without any trouble. I was wrong, and my traumatised feelings returned. I began feeling extremely isolated and full of self-loathing.

In the next two weeks I endeavoured to contact my solicitor three times as I hadn't received the letter of confirmation for my psychiatric evaluation nor had I received the costing agreement. After further phone calls and faxes, I finally received a response by phone telling me that I would be sent a letter confirming my appointment with the psychiatrist and that the solicitors would make sure the costing agreement was in my lap within two days. That way, I could sign it and bring it to the Sydney meeting.

I never received the costing agreement. I arrived in Sydney and had my appointments with my solicitors and their psychiatrist over a two-day period. My meeting with the

solicitor was distressing to say the least. Within five minutes he aggressively proceeded to cross-examine me in regard to my sexual abuse without forewarning. His behaviour was arrogant and totally insensitive to the stress that this type of questioning would place on anybody, especially those who had been sexually abused. He clearly had no concern for me as a person. He was only interested in how much money the case could make for him.

When I said I was willing to go to court, his face lit up like a Christmas tree. As it turned out, soon afterwards this solicitor decided to leave his position at the law firm and follow a vocation as a Christian Minister. While in Sydney, I also decided to take the psychiatric evaluation asked for by the solicitors acting for the Church. I was fearful about going through with this, as I was warned that the whole approach of this evaluation could be conducted to minimise the adverse effect the sexual abuse had on my life and to question the validity and accuracy of my memory so that my memory could not be used in court.

I was also informed that if any counselling, therapy sessions or reports were carried out in a coercive or leading manner, they could not be used as evidence and to be mindful of this. In all the counselling, therapy sessions and reports that I had undertaken, this was the only one where the evaluator clearly tried to coerce me into agreeing with his view on a number of points, and overtly dismissed other points that I felt to be important.

He also insisted that because I recalled these events only three years ago, they were suppressed memories and therefore could not have adversely affected me prior to their recollection, nor could they be accurate. I will address this in more detail in a later chapter.

I will add that during the session I felt I was being abused once again by the Catholic Church psychiatrist's incredible arrogance and dismissal of my truthful recollection of these events. He insisted on dictating my own thoughts and

feelings to me, and refused to acknowledge me when I told him these were not my feelings or thoughts.

Are suppressed, memories not affecting our daily lives? Are they inaccurate? What is a suppressed memory? Its actually very simple – for example, if I was to ask you to recall the memory of a certain friend that you had not seen or thought about for many years and the experiences you shared together, good and bad, can you recall them? You probably can and with accuracy. But if this question never came up in conversation then, without some other event triggering your memory, you may never think about this friend. Does that make it a suppressed memory that is inaccurate? Does that mean that this friendship has had no impact on your life until now?

My point is that because these events took place years ago, it does not make them, on recollection, less true or accurate. Sadly, this misguided reasoning has been used to silence survivors throughout the world, and was soon to be used against me by the court system as well.

A Help Guide While Disclosing to Solicitors

1. Studies show it can take time to recall past traumatic events. So be gentle on yourself and take your time.

2. When you have your initial meeting with a solicitor, have a friend or counsellor go with you.

3. Speak to your counsellor about any stress that you have surrounding your communications with your solicitor. This could be important information further down the legal track and your counsellor can document this and also support you to find ways to decrease stress.

4. Request that your psychiatric evaluation be taped and/or request that your solicitor or counsellor be present at the evaluation. Make sure you receive a copy of your evaluation.

5. If you consider your evaluator to be biased, and is minimising the effect of your abuse, still complete your meet-

ing. Gain a copy of their evaluation for your records then inform your solicitor and request another evaluation.

The Courts

Today I waited outside a Sydney courthouse in readiness to recall in front of a jury the sexual abuse that took place at ten years of age. There is nothing quite like the feeling of an imminent cross examination, knowing full well that the intention of the legal representative for the other side is not to uncover the truth but to explain it away.

In the morning, before my appearance in court, I was introduced to the Crown, the person who presents my case to the court. Immediately after introducing himself, he asked me whether I wanted this accused old man, the perpetrator, to go to jail. I said that I didn't see the relevance of the question. He asked me again, did I want this old man to go to jail. He then elaborated that it seemed that his abuse of me was an aberration that occurred in the accused man's life twenty-seven years ago and that he had now re-established himself in society and no longer participated in this sort of behaviour.

What the Crown did not know was that, as the policeman investigating my case had informed me, this seventy-eight year old man was reported to have recently tried to sexually molest a young boy. Or did the Crown know this?

The Crown then asked me if by some slim chance I would accept the accused's admittance to two counts of sexual abuse, rather than the whole lot. However, at this point the accused was still not officially admitting he even knew who I was!

With some hesitation I answered yes. It was then made clear to me that cases such as these were traumatic for everyone concerned and that the general feeling was to get them out of the way as soon as possible. It would be beneficial for all concerned if the case could be settled out

of the courtroom, hence the out of court negotiations.

I felt myself turning into a sheep and agreed, although feeling sick in my stomach. In the afternoon I was called back to the courthouse to prepare to testify. I asked my solicitor whether my perpetrator would be here today. He said yes and that if I wanted to see him to look back over my shoulder.

I turned and from around the corner appeared the man that molested me all those years ago. As I saw his familiar face I filled with excitement just as I had as a boy of ten. My heart leapt and I had to stop myself from acting impulsively and running over to see him.

I looked at my partner and she saw how excited I was, then she watched as I dropped into absolute confusion as the reality of what he did sunk in. As I felt the full impact of his betrayal, overwhelming feelings began to strangle me and my rage burnt through from the back of my eyes.

I wanted to scream but instead dropped my head and walked away as fast as I could, hoping to find a place to be alone. I slumped down around a corner and held myself up by leaning on a wall. I wanted to vomit, but I heard my name being called, so I took several slow deep breaths and walked over to the others, doing my best to compose myself.

The Crown and solicitor informed me that the perpetrator was considering admitting to two counts of sexual abuse on me, and two upon the other class member (this was my classmate's case, paralleling mine at the time and almost identical).

The Crown became annoyed as he informed me that the other class member was not willing to settle with just two counts, that he wanted the whole truth to come out. I felt incredibly supported by this classmate, and said to the Crown that I wanted to support the other man and since it seemed that the matter wouldn't be resolved this afternoon I would rethink my position. This didn't go down very well and I was reminded by the Crown that 'a bird in the hand is

worth two in the bush'.

At that, the Crown left and my solicitor told me to give him a call in a week with my decision; I thanked him and said goodbye.

That night I was absolutely exhausted and the following day I just wanted it all to end as I was petrified at the thought of having to testify in court. All I needed to do to stop this was to accept the offer; make one simple phone call and settle for less than the whole truth.

The other choice was to not accept the offer and go to court. The perpetrator would then go to court innocent until proven guilty, the whole abuse case having to be proven in court with lengthy cross-examination.

Can you imagine how tempting it was at the time to make that phone call?

Emotional Repercussions

Every time my partner has come to kiss me in the last three weeks I have been repulsed by it, I have really struggled with her wanting to kiss me. I just haven't wanted to be touched, especially on the mouth. My partner respects this and I know how much holding back hurts her and goes against who she is. She keeps her distance in anticipation that things will change and that a little bit of grace will fall on us again, on me, so she can share another intimate moment with the partner that she has always loved so completely and fully. She lives in the hope that one day the love will be returned more fully.

I went for my run last night and realised that my partner has been the only woman I have ever known who has loved me consistently, stood by me and, when with me, has been fully committed to us. She had been completely brave-hearted. As I realised this, I had a vague memory of being the same way at one point in my life, of being brave-hearted. I quietly asked my inner self to help me experience this again.

I asked love to pass over me with this gift, 'Please… I want to experience being brave-hearted again…'

After returning home from my run I lay on our bed and as I did my partner lent across to kiss me, no matter how much I tried to stop myself, I felt myself pull back. She said to me gently that she wanted to make love to me and asked whether it was all right to kiss me.

I wanted so much for it to be all right, but as I was thinking of my response we both noticed I had placed my hand across my mouth. I felt speechless, small, stupid and weak.

She looked at me understandingly and said, "I guess not."

I could cope with her touching my body; I just didn't want to be kissed. Then the answer came – my perpetrator used to kiss me on my lips and tell me how gorgeous I was, and I had not wanted to be kissed on my lips or told I was loveable since seeing the perpetrator outside the court. My partner and I sat there and held each other, both of us knowing that more of the truth had surfaced.

Back to Court

Four months later I was sitting outside the courtroom again. I'd already been to court to give evidence on two other occasions and I was hoping that this was going to be the very last time. I was so frightened. Here I was a victim of someone else's actions upon me when I was ten years old and I was so frightened I thought I was going to pee my pants.

Once again I sat outside the courtroom waiting to be either called in or told a jury will be selected and we will proceed with a trial. With me were my brother, my counsellor and two policemen that were investigating the case. We sat there and talked about the criminal justice system, and how the system seemed to protect the criminals.

The two policemen were angry and frustrated with the system. I asked how many men who where victims of sexual

abuse at an early age in Church schools where coming forward like myself. Apparently, there were two or three a month that were coming through this court alone, but only ten percent of them went to trial.

We were waiting with four other men who were all accomplished professionals in their fields. There I was with no profession, out of work, out of faith and not really functioning that well in the 'real world.' I realised miserably that they all knew what had happened to me, and I burned with shame.

I excused myself and went for a walk, I felt so isolated and embarrassed. Once again I began to chastise myself for not having been smart enough to protect myself from the abuse. I started to isolate myself more and more.

Then my intuition kicked in and said *Tell them. Tell them what you feel*.

I went back to the four men and stepped into the conversation once again, "I need to say something to you all and I'm not going to find any words that will make it easier for me so I'm just going to come out with it."

They looked at me with deep concern, sincerity and regard. "What is it John, tell us?"

I replied "I want you all to know that I'm feeling a great deal of fear and shame from being here with you all and with that said, I want to thank you for being here and supporting me. My shame has had time to build up over a long period. I've always thought I was stupid and would never be as smart as the next guy, because I didn't see the abuse coming."

They were all touched; my brother's face portrayed a look of helplessness that I had not seen before.

One of them spoke, "John, remember you were ten years old at the time, not an adult yet. This man betrayed you; he took full advantage of your innocence. It could have happened to any one of us, any one of us!"

They looked at each other and nodded, then looked back at me. They were moved and I recognised their genuine

care. Suddenly I felt a sense of belonging as once again those around me had lifted me out of isolation and despair. All it took was to speak what was true in my heart.

A short time later the court session was closed for the day. A member of my family suggested I go home and rest.

Back the following morning, I again waited anxiously outside the courtroom. Not knowing if I would be called forward to give evidence or not was getting to me. Inside the courtroom, they were deliberating as to whether my memory of an incident that occurred some twenty years ago could be used as evidence in a court of law.

Finally I was called in to hear the decision. The Magistrate announced that there was no way of proving that my memory was accurate or inaccurate, even though other victims had come forward and given evidence confirming my memory. Regardless of what he believed, he concluded that our judicial system was not equipped to judge a case such as this.

A short monologue from the magistrate directed at Mr. Smitts and those attending followed; he shared his concerns on the inappropriateness of allowing small boys to sit on teacher's knees, followed by a stern look over his reading glasses.

The case against my perpetrator was dismissed. I sat there wondering how many other boys he had betrayed over the years and how their lives as men had been horribly affected. I felt sick, but deep inside me I knew that I had proven something to myself. I left the courtroom for the last time and all I wanted was to be alone.

Within minutes I found my way to an empty restroom. It was blissfully quiet, no people, no words, just me standing in front of a mirror. I had just splashed water on my face when the most remarkable thing happened. I raised my head to look in the mirror and for the first time in twenty-eight years I could sense 'me' at ten years of age! Tears of joy streamed down my face, and a loving 'thank you' from this

ten year old resounded in my whole being. Somehow I knew that I had finally reached inside myself deep enough to find the isolated soul of my ten-year-old boy, and now that he felt safe enough, he was with me again.

The courtroom experience reminded me of watching a closing act of a weak play with no real conclusion reached. The Church reacted by officially denying the abuse ever took place, but offered me a small compensation payout on the condition that I sign a 'Deed of Release' document, legally silencing me from disclosing most details of the abuse for the rest of my life.

It was not long after this court day that I received a confirming call from the policeman investigating my case. He was stressed and deeply sorry that the case had not come to any truthful conclusion. He told me that my case was among many over the years that he had investigated that were dismissed by the court. He shared with me his utter frustration that these criminals and their representatives used the judicial system to avoid facing charges. He also said that he found it almost impossible to convict these people, because the court system was used by religious and other organisations to pervert the course of justice. He subsequently left the police force, after many years of service.

About the Deed of Release

A *Deed of Release* is a legal document used to bind those mentioned in the deed with its outlined content through their signing. The deed of release document I was presented with legally released the Church organisation, its affiliated bodies, and alleged assailant(s) referred to in the deed, from any responsibility or accountability for the claims outlined against them in the deed. The deed stated if I accepted payment of the agreed sum, then the deed became a 'covenant' that restricted me at any time from publishing (or causing to be published) correspondence, articles, books or other

writings relating to or concerning the content of the deed. The only time I could do so was if required by law or for the purposes of upholding the deed. I also could not at any time disclose the names of anyone mentioned in the document, the organisations they were associated with, the location I was allegedly abused at or the amount of money I was awarded under the heading of 'Pastoral Care' ('Pastoral Care' is care offered by the Church in support of one's recovery from one's own emotional and personal issues).

If I did not sign the deed in agreement to its terms and conditions, no compensation would be awarded to me. Furthermore, should I break the agreement in any way at any time, I would be liable for prosecution. This legally binding document silenced me completely. It denied my right to speak the truth and I was not going to sign it.

Now that I had come this far, I wanted to share my experiences with other abuse victims, so they too could feel safe to come forward. Through my own journey I had learned first-hand that while we remain in denial, there is no way to move forward. To be silenced now would, from my point of view, make my whole journey pointless.

By chance, I came into some inheritance during this period and could afford the time to push the issue further. It certainly was not easy, but after eighteen months of discussion, lengthy delays and much stress, the Church and I came to an agreement as to what terms the Deed of Release would include.

Finally, the deed had a new clause that stated I could publish an account of my experience, give public lectures, counsel other survivors, promote awareness of the crime of child sexual assault and attempt to break down taboos associated with such crimes. However, I could still not identify the institution, location or real names of parties mentioned in the deed, nor the agreed sum of money.

For decades a Deed of Release has been an effective measure the Church has adopted to silence and obstruct

abuse victims from gaining any momentum and strength to address this worldwide issue. It is effectively a payout in return for shutting up, and gives the Church the legal right to prosecute abuse victims if they speak publicly about their abuse.

Incredibly, the Church still remains relatively clear of accountability for the affects their abuse has had on victim's lives, avoiding any real reform within their organisation and possibly continuing to give abusers a platform to carry out their actions. The Church has been accused of simply relocating priests accused of abuse to other schools instead of removing them from their positions. How many thousands of abuse victims have signed and been silenced by such releases in the past we may never know. Although, it only takes a quick search on the Internet to find that in the United States alone, over three thousand civil lawsuits have been filed against the Church and they have spent literally billions of dollars in payouts over the last decades. (For more information about the lawsuits being carried out worldwide see http://www.bishop-accountability.org)

Unfortunately, deeds of release have been used extensively by the Church to contain these matters from spilling over into the media and having a negative effect on their global image and financial regime. This has had a devastating impact on those victims seeking reconciliation with their Church and Christians worldwide that once viewed this Church's doctrine and moral code as the Gospel truth.

Presently, as a Christian, I see no Christian ethics in this organisation. The Church is still not acting transparently and instead it takes all measures possible to minimise information of these atrocities being introduced into the public arena. At no time has the Church encouraged ongoing advisory campaigns that support past and present victims of bullying, sexual, physical, emotional or psychological abuse to come forward for assistance.

The Church has also not established an international register of perpetrators for police, psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors to access. Such a register could contain important statistics for professionals to access when assisting victims and the cross-referencing could gather vital information for investigations to help track and understand these crimes, not to mention that it could minimise the risk of perpetrators repeating their acts of abuse. A list of schools, districts, locations and the years that abuse occurred in is still not publicly accessible.

In my view, by the implementation of preventative measures, such as those I have outlined above, all victims would find healing in the Church's public display of a united effort in the fight against abusers reoffending,.

Regrettably, presenting a united voice in these matters has never been the Church's strong point. Reluctantly I signed the amended Deed of Release, feeling it was the best I could hope for at this stage. I had seemingly exhausted every available avenue and, with the wellbeing of my child paramount, I accepted the small compensation amount and put my energy into healing and getting on with my life.

But I was still unsatisfied; the Church had not accepted responsibility for what occurred at my primary school and this felt like a continuation of the abuse.

A Duty of Care

I first noticed the term 'Duty of Care' being used in the media in the year 2000. I searched for a definition of the term and found it is:

> A legal obligation imposed on an organisation or individuals requiring that they adhere to a standard of reasonable human care while in the role of caring for others.

Did this term apply to religious organisations' activities?

Could I encourage the Church to accept responsibility for the physical and emotional abuse that I, and so many others, had suffered in high school?

Signing the Deed of Release meant the sexual abuse in primary school had been legally compensated for. However the physical, emotional and psychological bullying that occurred in high school remained unaddressed. The abusive teachers responsible for my care in high school certainly seemed to be negligent in their Duty of Care to me.

Apart from the abuse I suffered, there were also far too many times in high school that I witnessed students being excessively beaten, publicly humiliated, screamed at, ridiculed in front of their class, taken to other classes and ridiculed by teachers until they were shaking and reduced to tears, and their self-esteem destroyed.

I was further intrigued reading a news article about a female employee who won a Duty of Care case against her employer. She had been bullied and harassed (emotionally, sexually, psychologically and physically) at her workplace, and when she reported this to her superior they had failed to address the behaviour.

Because her employer had neglected to provide her with a safe workplace she contacted her lawyers and successfully sued the organisation under a claim of Duty of Care and was realistically compensated. As Duty of Care cases were being addressed under Workplace Health and Safety (WH&S) protocols worldwide and proving successful for adults in the workplace, would it not be the same for children at school?

As a terrified boy experiencing and witnessing the abuse in high school, the best I could muster was to tell my parents, who told the principal of the school. But the school's response was minimal and the teachers continued to abuse others and myself in the following years. Now as a grown man, I felt it would be a gross oversight in regard to my personal and civil responsibility, my own sense of Duty of Care, not to speak out and address this psychological and

physical abuse that had been inflicted upon so many young men at my school.

I asked myself, 'as a leading nation have we modified, standardised and implemented WH&S protocols that protect our children while in the educational care of religious and other organisations? If so, are they being upheld?'

WH&S protocols have developed in workplaces over many years through collaboration between unions, governments, insurers and workers. They are based around providing a safe and fair workplace by identifying and minimising risks and hazards before injuries can occur. In some instances they include weekly meetings and assessments by qualified inspectors and provide a platform for workers to express their own safety concerns. So why, as a progressive country, do we not enforce upon our religious educational organisations WH&S protocols and insurance premiums that reflect the large number of re-occurring claims of child abuse that occur within these organisations?

As I see it, while the Church remains preoccupied with covering up the abuse that happens under their current child protection protocols, none of the above-mentioned preventative measures can be put in place, because accepting the need for reform would involve an admission of the large-scale abuse that has occurred and highlight the Church's dismal past failures to protect children under its care.

This accountability is something the Church seems to be avoiding at all costs. Meanwhile, abuse victims are still unrealistically compensated and children are left unprotected and at risk. Currently in Australia, the Church is only legally bound to address reports of child sexual abuse; crimes of child sexual abuse reported to the police are acts that can be punishable by law. But the Church currently has no legal obligation to respond to claims of any other abuse brought to their attention.

As I considered my case I saw a huge disparity here between the Church's response to claims of child sexual

abuse and claims of child emotional, psychological and physical abuse. I felt that legal action might help to bring this issue to the Church's attention and positive change could follow.

After lengthy consideration, I decided to pursue a Duty of Care case against my old Church-run high school. My hope was that one day, the Church would sincerely admit, to individuals and society as a whole, that these acts took place in many of its educational institutions worldwide, and they were profoundly sorry for silencing these crimes. Then the reconciliation process could begin. Victims on both sides could finally grieve the loss of being caught up in this horrific, traumatic human event. The Church's vast resources could be far better spent if they stopped using them to cover up these horrendous events and instead put their energy into trying to prevent them from ever happening again.

I contacted the Church representative responsible for handling abuse claims, as we had spoken many times before, and told him that I was reporting my case of Duty of Care. I asked what he thought about this. I recall his pause. He said that if I was to mention anything about a case of Duty of Care to the Church in Australia they would become very confrontational, scared and extremely uncomfortable.

He also expressed that he did not like my chances and added, "John, do you really want to go through this again?"

I said, "I will send through my statement as soon as possible."

Preparing the Case

Within the next few weeks I had sent my statement to the Church offices and found a law firm that was interested in taking my case. After discussion, the lawyers and I agreed that obtaining a copy of the Psychiatric Evaluation Report that I had undertaken several years earlier (with the Church-appointed psychiatrist as standard legal procedure

during my sexual abuse case) was now crucial to our current case.

During the evaluation the psychiatrist had asked me questions such as, "How was life growing up in your family?" "What exactly happened to you in primary school regarding the sexual abuse?" "How was high school for you?"

And afterwards he had informed me of what his evaluation would conclude; he would write that the psychological effects of the sexual abuse that took place in primary school were minimal. This was because the 'care' that I received from the male perpetrator gave me the male attention that I so craved from my distant father. The main psychological damage, he said he would report, was done by the physical, mental and emotional abuse that was inflicted by the teachers in secondary school.

I should add that, at the time, Duty of Care cases were unheard of and the type of abuse that I experienced in high school was not considered a compensable crime. Therefore it had served the Church's defence to play down the trauma of the primary school sexual abuse, for which I was claiming compensation, and play up the damage caused by the high school physical and psychological abuse.

This Psychiatric Evaluation Report was therefore a crucial document for my current case because it would prove beyond doubt that the Church was well aware of the extent of the damage caused by the physical, psychological and emotional bullying I had received in secondary school. Unfortunately, obtaining a copy of this report proved to be extremely difficult.

One would assume that a psychiatric report specifically designed to outline the effects of child sexual abuse on a victim is a critical legal document to be kept on file, especially if the psychiatrist could be called forth to testify of his findings in a court of law.

This report had also been officially referred to in my sexual abuse claim deed of release. Surely such a report

would be kept on file by solicitors acting on behalf of the Church, the psychiatrist himself who carried out the evaluation at a major city hospital, the solicitors acting on my behalf, and of course a copy attached to the deed I had signed. However, I did not find a copy attached to any of the documents I had been given.

As my solicitors commenced tracking down the missing report I received my first response back from the Catholic Church representative Fr. Brian Lucas, Archdiocesan Secretary:

> I am replying on behalf of his Eminence… As to your request to commence discussions about compensation I should indicate that this is not a matter that comes within the scope of 'Towards Healing', or is covered by any insurance, and, on the information provided, it is not clear that there is any basis of legal liability. I would welcome a copy of any legal advice you have received that would support a claim of compensation.

I responded: "I'm absolutely sure that legally this matter at present has no standing in a court of law and your 'Towards Healing' could be seen as to not cover such abuse. However it could also be seen to cover all acts of humanitarian abuse, depending upon who is governing it. Your letter is a legal response to a humanitarian request. I'm deeply disappointed with your initial response…"

After I'd sent my response, another Church representative contacted me. He invited me to an informal meeting in an office of the Church in the city, with all travel expenses paid for. He added that they could provide a mediator for the meeting to make sure I felt safe and that if I wanted I could choose my own mediator for the meeting and bring a friend or family member along too for support.

I saw this uncharacteristic show of care as progress and decided to trust this representative and go with their mediator. This mediator, turned out to be the same Church representative I was corresponding with, a Mr. Fush. I also asked

Stacy, a friend and advocate who was interested in my case, to come along. She had experience with the Church and assured me she was highly competent in dealing with meetings such as these and would ensure that my rights would be upheld.

The 'Missing' Psychiatric Evaluation Report

While I waited for the meeting date, my solicitors received replies to their requests for a copy of the Psychiatric report from the various parties they had petitioned. The hospital where the evaluation had taken place replied: "I refer to your letter dated ___ and wish to advice that we have no record of the above named patient having attended this hospital."

My current solicitors wrote the following to me in regard to my previous solicitors: "We have been in contact with them in relation to the report and they claim to be unaware of its whereabouts; having forwarded the entire file to us."

I then received further correspondence from my current solicitors in regard to the solicitors acting on behalf of the Church:

> We note that _____ Solicitors who acted for the Church in your previous claim, are unwilling to release the Psychiatric report to us. They have forwarded our request for release of the document to Catholic Church Insurances (CCI), *and advise that the Insurance Company must determine whether or not the document will be released to us.*

Then we received a letter from Catholic Church Insurances:

> *Catholic Church Insurances respectfully declines to release the psychiatric report to which you refer*. We are aware that the psychiatrist has declined to give permission for the release of this report also. We are aware that your client was legally represented throughout his earlier action against

> our clients. *Given that you indicate that your client may be intending to seek further damages from our client we do not believe it would be appropriate to discuss this matter further as we are not a party to this new action*.

Catholic Church Insurances made the decision not to release the Psychiatric Report in this instance, and I will add that the Church Insurers are a subsidiary of the Church.

It is worth to note that Catholic Church Insurances was established in 1911. This corporation has had a 'unique relationship' with the Catholic Church for over 100 years!

To support the physical abuse aspect of my case, I found a specialist who agreed to examine my hands. Over the last thirty years, certain joints in my fingers would bleed internally even when I bumped them gently. They would rupture just as they did when I was hit with the cane in high school and the strap in primary school.

After a thorough examination, Dr. White concluded that there was a high possibility of a link between the excessive beatings at school and the deformity of my right hand. He also said he was willing to testify to this in a court of law.

While talking, I mentioned to him the difficulty I was facing acquiring a copy of the psychiatric report. He replied that, as a specialist himself, he should not have any difficulty acquiring a copy. In fact, it would be invaluable to him to review before writing a conclusive report on his findings. He mentioned that specialists often requested reports from each other and he would make some enquiries.

A few weeks went by and still the report could not be found. Dr. White could not believe how another specialist could misplace such a document. He found this highly unethical and unprofessional.

A short time later I received another letter from the Church's representative, Fr. Brian Lucas:

> …In any event the Archdiocese is not willing to entertain further negotiations and is of the view that

> *your client has been fairly dealt with in the spirit of Towards Healing.*"

This was a complete contradiction to his first letter that stated, "…this is not a matter that comes within the scope of Towards Healing."

He then argued that I had already been compensated for the abuse that I was now seeking compensation for: "The payment made pursuant to the Deed of Release was an ex gratia payment with a denial of legal liability. It envisaged assisting you with respect to the matters that you were complaining of and this included the matter of the complaint involving High School."

In my experience with the forming of a Deed of Release, as with most legal documents, if some action is 'envisaged', you will find it clearly written in the deed.

He further informed me that the Deed of Release I had previously signed in regard to my sexual abuse claim included a reference to a certain psychiatric report, and that this psychiatric report gave reference to 'excessive and unjust physical punishment' in secondary school. Therefore because this report was mentioned in the Deed of Release, I had effectively signed away my legal right to seek any further compensation.

I found this absurd because it was blatantly obvious that the psychiatric report had only been mentioned in the Deed of Release to minimise my sexual abuse claim; the later abuse certainly wasn't being compensated for. Although I had informed them of the high school abuse, the deed I had signed stated quite specifically that I was being compensated for abuse that occurred in and around 1972, the year I turned ten.

I found it preposterous that Fr. Brian Lucas, the Archdiocesan secretary, was citing this report but was refusing to send a copy to my solicitors and me. The use of the report's information was at the Church's discretion only and I saw this as a complete abuse of power.

If such a powerful report was integral to my prior compensation claim, why had it not been attached to that Deed of Release with the other related legal documentation for me and my solicitors to view?

The Informal Meeting

My advocate and I made the journey to the city where the Church offices were housed for our informal meeting to discuss my case. We met with the Church-appointed mediator Mr. Fush for ten minutes prior to the actual meeting, to discuss how the meeting would proceed.

Mr. Fush showed concern for my wellbeing and seemed focused on creating a secure and supportive environment. After all, "The meeting, John, is for you," he said.

Mr. Fush said he would ensure that Fr. Brian Lucas would abide by our agreed meeting protocol before the meeting began. The meeting protocol determined that, after introductions, Fr. Lucas would be silent while I read a statement of my experience. This would be followed by Fr. Lucas' 'pastoral' response.

Given the difficulty of disclosing and discussing such matters, it was suggested by the mediator that this be followed by a ten-minute break. After the break Fr. Lucas would outline the Church's 'practical' response. The meeting would then end with a short discussion on where to go from here.

The model for the meeting seemed very civil and supportive, and Mr. Fush had been helpful and caring. My advocate and I were impressed and thought, 'What a breakthrough! What could possibly go wrong?'

The meeting commenced with our introductions but immediately Fr. Lucas began showing signs of discomfort and agitation. I proceeded to read out my statement; at times this was extremely difficult for me and both my advocate and the mediator could not hold back their feelings. However, it

seemed the more I disclosed my abuse experience, the more Fr. Lucas became infuriated.

It was not long before he began interjecting with such statements as, "You have already been compensated for this!" And, "If you think you can come here and get more money out of us you have another thing coming!"

I politely asked him to follow the protocols he had agreed to before the meeting commenced. He laughed at me. The mediator said nothing. My advocate was struck speechless at what was transpiring. I was on my own.

Fr. Brian Lucas began to interrogate me aggressively, wanting to know my reasons for coming to the meeting. I said that he was the one who had initiated the meeting, and paid for my airfare and accommodation. I reminded him that my position was outlined in the letter I had written him, and to please respect the meeting protocol he had agreed to not more than an hour ago.

He stopped momentarily and I proceeded. After a few sentences he started laughing and smirking. I thought to myself, 'this is unbelievable, why is this not being recorded?' I asked him why he was not respecting the agreed upon protocol?

At that the mediator barked at *me* to keep quiet! Mr. Fush was cowering; after all, this irate priest was his boss.

Fr. Lucas glared at my advocate Stacy condescendingly and spat, "Well if my behaviour was a problem I'm sure Stacy would have said something by now."

Stacy looked at him completely speechless. I responded for her, "I would not be taking Stacy's silence as a sign of agreement with your behaviour!"

Stacy meekly confirmed my statement. At that, Fr. Lucas almost exploded out of his seat. It seemed he was under the impression that he was above us all and could not tolerate his authority being challenged in any way. I recognised the same arrogance that had characterised my abusive high school teachers.

Fr. Brian Lucas ended the meeting abruptly, saying insincerely, "Thank you John for going out of your way to meet me today." He then smirked at me once again and extended his hand for me to shake. I did not extend mine. I noticed the familiar look on his face that I had seen on others like him many years before. He was enjoying the pleasure of knowing I felt powerless and small. Perhaps he felt pleased that the meeting had accomplished exactly what he had intended – to intimidate and humiliate me. It was obvious the meeting was nothing more than an attempt to shut this case of Duty of Care down once and for all.

After the meeting Stacy apologised for being totally out of her depth and was in disbelief as to what had transpired. We both asked Mr. Fush, "What happened to your mediation and protocol practices?"

He mumbled a feeble excuse, but was clearly unconvinced himself. I asked him if he had informed Fr. Lucas of the protocols prior to the meeting, and if Fr. Lucas had agreed to them. He lowered his head and said he had not. I asked why he did not inform us of this prior to the meeting. He did not have an answer. I challenged him on why he had asked me not to interrupt Fr. Brian Lucas when he was behaving abusively. He did not have an answer. In fact he did not have an answer to any of this. He finally apologised. Was he a part of setting this up as well? Was his previous show of concern intended just to lure me in? Or was he fearful of the detrimental effect this involvement would cause to his position within the Church, and his salary?

I noticed a short time later he had been promoted up the Church's lucrative bureaucratic ladder. I guessed this showed that the Church was happy with how he was handling cases such as mine.

It shocks me to uncover that Fr. Brian J Lucas, LL.M. M.GEN.STUD. S.T.L. DIP.JUR. GRAD.DIP.R.E, GAICD, joined the Board of Catholic Church Insurances in August 2003. Note that this was in the middle of my duty of care case against the

Catholic Church. He currently holds the position of General Secretary of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, a position he has held since August 2002. Before this he was Archdiocesan Secretary and Financial Administrator of the Archdiocese of Sydney and assistant priest to numerous parishes in Australia. He is also a member of the Charities Consultative Committee of the Australian Taxation Office.

Fr. Lucas has special tasks as well that include: Chairman of the Directors' Governance Committee and member of the Board Audit, Risk Management & Compliance Committee and Investment Committee.

These days he is known as Reverend Brian J Lucas. Reverend means a person worthy of honour…

Another Deed of Release

A few weeks passed and I received another letter from the Church via my solicitors:

> *...however, as I have discussed with you in recognition of your client's ongoing distress Cardinal Pell has authorised me to inform you that he is willing to make a pastoral response to your client by way of a quite modest ex gratia payment.* Such payment would be predicated on a very clear understanding that it does not validate your client's assertion that the formal settlement of his Towards Healing claim against the Church has not been completed.

The Church solicitors then put together another Deed of Release for me to sign. This time it stated that the abuse in secondary school was covered by the previous sexual abuse claim 'Deed of Release' under the 'Church Protocol' document. This new deed would state I was fully aware of this but I am now seeking further compensation nonetheless.

In order to receive compensation I was being asked to sign a document that indicated I had misled the Church.

My solicitors and I petitioned the solicitors acting on behalf of the Church to remove this clause. Not a chance. I was advised by my solicitors to sign this document and get on with my life as their hands were legally tied. Under great duress, I regretfully signed the document, as by this stage legal fees were piling up and any financial remuneration was a positive.

I swallowed my integrity by signing the document, but I felt good at least about once again bringing the issue of physical and emotional abuse to the attention of the Church.

The case may well have been the first such case in Australia. I had also spoken up about the abuse and fulfilled my sense of Duty of Care to my younger self and my former classmates.

The Outcome

I feel I have been abused three times by this religious organisation. Firstly, by the effects of the original abuse whilst in their care, secondly, by the Church's denial that abuse ever occurred, and thirdly by the Church's neglect to respond honestly and compensate realistically.

People often ask me, "Surely they looked after you adequately? After all, you are talking about the largest and oldest humanitarian organisation in the world."

I tell them, "I would have been compensated far more if I had my nose broken by a celebrity!"

There is also a fourth abuse currently taking place here against the spirit of humanity. This abuse is caused by the Church's mass decision to flagrantly and arrogantly use their power within our society to cover up their organisation's crimes.

Why do the people of this organisation do this when they could instead be spiritually pioneering the healing way forward? Why do we still send our children to their schools while these protocols are still not abided by and respected?

The Church, in its present form, is unwilling to look directly at its past and recurring behavioural contributions to humanitarian abuse and is also unwilling to choose a healing response. The Church has spent hundreds of years more concerned with preserving its Godly appearance and traditions rather than being primarily focused upon following Christ's teachings.

I respect tradition but I am passionate about the truth. No wonder people have lost sight of what this institution represents. The effort, money and resources required for damage control around the preservation of its public image is stupendous, yet it continues to take all possible measures to avoid accountability for its own mistakes. Why?

I believe we need to look together at the truth so we can let forgiveness do its work. These days, I pray the Church, as a reflection of humanity, faces the truth of its past and present humanitarian violations, so that it can begin and process of forgiveness and embody one of humanity's greatest healing journeys ever to take place in our civilisation.

My Hope for the Future

Currently the Australian Government has commenced an official inquiry entitled *Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations.* The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), established in 1948, with Australia being a member since 1971, recently made an important decision with global ramifications. On May 25th 2011, its member countries agreed to revise their guidelines to promote tougher standards of corporate behaviour, including human rights. As part of this revision they utilised a new 'due diligence' clause (the term 'due diligence' first came into common use as a result of the United States securities Act of 1933). Following is an excerpt from the *O.E.C.D Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises,*

which outlines the recent addition to OECD guidelines that religious and other organisations fall under:

> First, the enterprises are called upon to respect human rights, meaning, they should avoid infringing on human rights of others and should address adverse human rights impacts with which they are involved. Second, within the context of their own activities, enterprises should avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts and address such impacts when they occur. Third, enterprises should seek ways to prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are directly linked to their business operations, products or services by a business relationship, even if they do not contribute to those impacts.

I hope that our country's Royal Commission looks to world organisations such as the OECD as a resource, so they utilise our country's financial wealth and their time effectively to expedite change and make Australia the model for other countries to follow. Australia is also one of 54 members of the Commonwealth of Nations. As a member we are obligated to uphold democracy, human rights, rule of law, individual liberty, world peace and most importantly the rejection of international coercion. This leads me to ask: Should Australia remain in the Commonwealth if it cannot uphold Commonwealth values in regard to the adverse influence the Vatican seems to have on Australian law via the Catholic Church, especially in regard to the Catholic Church's past and present cover-up of child abuse internationally?

My hope is that victims, and those indirectly affected by child abuse, may one day find peace in knowing there is a public awareness programme in place that breaks down the social taboo that greatly restricts the disclosure of past and present abuse acts; that their government is active in creating organisational reform within religious and other organisations where child abuse occurs.

I hope that realistic financial compensation packages are in place for victims who have endured life long emotional, psychological and financial suffering as a consequence of their time in these religious educational institutions, and also that their painful and courageous disclosures of abuse contribute to the Australian Government enforcing organisational protocols that stop child abuse recurring within them. As a Christian that is what I want.

Author's Final Note

I really wanted to end this book on the positive note by saying everything is over! I'm healed! Well, unfortunately this is not a fairy tale and, even though it would be a great selling point, it's not the truth at present.

I also wanted to end this by writing that now my heart remains open at all times to my partner and my children. However, I can't write this either. We decided after twelve years that it was time to let go. What a precious relationship. I don't think I would have survived without such a gift.

I wanted to write that I no longer doubt who I am in the world and that I have realised the worth of what I have to give. Well, this doesn't quite fit as yet either, though it is changing. There is, however, one thing I found that is true, above all things for me: *There is always the truth to uncover and fall back on, and I am safe within the truth.*

This has been a time of great self-discovery and I have placed myself on this journey to re-establish and remember who I am spiritually, through no-one else's means but my own. The only place that I'm going to search now is within, and the people who will help me will be ones I can trust to give me the tools to do so.

The religion that I was raised with, and its teachers, warned me not to still myself and go within, as I would only find evil there. They were misguided, as I was misguided by them. Now I know the only hope I have of finding 'me', of finding peace, is to go within and outwardly express what I find. This expression is the 'me' that I love.

This is my greatest challenge as **e**ach time I choose to look within, I prove to myself my worth. It is this action that acknowledges me as a creator and the gift in this is. I catch a glimpse of God. It's so simple.

Appendix: The Psychological Report is Finally Released

After 14 years of seeking the withheld Psychological Report, undertaken with the Catholic Church approved psychiatrist, my solicitors and I finally received a copy in February of 2013.

Although I had already suspected as much, the reality of the report's blasé attitude towards childhood sexual abuse shocked and disturbed me greatly. The spirit of humanity is reborn into the world at a rate of over 200 newborns a minute. The birth of a child is creation's ultimate gift to humanity. And this is humanity expressing itself at its most precious and innocent point. Children need our protection and this protection needs constant vigilance to make sure it has no weakness in its civil integration.

I ask, in some ways does this report reveal and confirm our society's apathy towards child sexual abuse? How and why has this apathy slipped through our society, current government, educational and spiritual institutions and their organisational structures for so long? We need drastic human correction! I believe a child's right to be cared for without exploitation needs to be more highly regarded than this report demonstrates.

Please read the report below and then go to my website http://sexualabusesurvivors.com.au to comment and share your thoughts on this critical issue.

The Psychological Report

This is the report that was sent to the Catholic Church solicitors. Due to privacy concerns parts of this report that refer to my work history, the deterioration of my daily functioning at the time, and comments about my family, have been edited out. I have also inserted my comments where the report was incorrect.

> Dear Mr. ------,
>
> RE: John Saunders; DOB: 25/06/1961
>
> Thank you for referring this 36 year old man for assessment in relation to allegations for child sexual abuse perpetrated by a member of the ------ Brother's teaching staff.
>
> He was assessed on the 1st December 1997. He was open in discussing issues and his mood appeared appropriate to the content under discussion.
>
> While his demeanour reflected the presence of underlying anger and emotional distress, its expression was contained and he did not become visibly shaken or distraught during the course of the interview.

Author Comment: I became visibly shaken and emotional on at least two occasions during the interview.

> Mr. Saunders stated that he was aged 10 years and was attending 6th Class at the ----- School when the alleged abuse involving his teacher, Br. -----, occurred. The typical pattern of abuse consisted of Br. ----- inviting favoured students whom he referred to with nicknames to approach his desk and sit on his lap. In respect to Mr. Saunders on such occasions, Brother ----- would place his hand inside his (Mr. Saunders) trousers, fondle his penis, blow into his ear and kiss him. This took place once to twice daily over a period of eight months.

Author Comment: The psychiatrist omitted my account of the teacher requesting that I visit him alone in his room one night on a school camp when I was ten years of age and the damaging consequence of me not going when I said I would. He also left out how distraught I became when recalling this memory during our interview.

> These episodes were not interpreted as coercive or unpleasant but rather regarded positively as an

> expression of the Brother's affection for him. The attention directed toward him made him feel special and wanted. The seemingly positive response shown toward the abuse at the time by Mr. Saunders can be best explained by understanding his overall school experience and interaction with peers and teachers.
>
> Firstly, from the description provided, it appears that Mr. Saunders was 'groomed' over time to become the teacher's pet. As this process progressed, it resulted in Mr. Saunders becoming increasingly isolated from, and resented by, his peers. As a consequence, he stated that he was picked (on), teased and bullied by his classmates. In this context, Bro. -----'s relationship was important in reasserting his self-worth and need for nurturance. It was only later in secondary school that he recognised that Brother ----- exploited the relationship for his own advantage.
>
> He stated that he was bullied 'a lot' by his peers at -------- High School. In addition, he claimed that he was picked upon by two teachers, Mr. ------ and Mr. ------ who also repeatedly put him down and physically punished him 'excessively' and unjustly with the leather strap. The physical punishment with the strap for a variety of misdemeanours was applied two to three times per term.

Author Comment: The repeated beating and punishment of me by one of these teachers in the stairwells, the leading me into other classrooms for the purpose of humiliation in front of my older peers and the continual negative repetitive remarks made by these teachers to me was left out of this report.

> One is not able to state with confidence whether teachers deliberately made comments designed to humiliate Mr. Saunders, or if Mr. Saunders incorrectly interpreted remarks in such light due to his sensitivity to criticism and rejection.

> What can be said is that under both sets of circumstances it is possible that a negative cycle of deteriorating behaviour was established. The fact that peers repeatedly bullied him may have led him to misbehave. This misbehaviour may have then exposed him to disciplinary action by teachers reinforcing his sense of rejection, injustice and poor self-esteem. This in turn led to further disruptive behaviours being manifested and resulted in further bulling behaviour by peers and disciplinary action on the part of the teachers.
>
> This process acted to undermine his self-esteem and ultimately led him to become resentful of his overall schooling experiences and accounted for his deterioration in academic performance. He acknowledged that he was unable to focus on studying and became attention seeking and disruptive in class as a consequence of his feelings of isolation.

Author Comment: I did not acknowledge that I became attention seeking and disruptive in class as a consequence of my feelings of isolation.

> Disclosure of Abuse: Mr. Saunders stated that in 1996 he experienced a marked deterioration in his depressive condition brought about by symptoms of increased irritability, isolation from family and sexual dysfunctions, and decided to seek consultation with a psychiatrist. He reported that in one session, he suddenly recalled a clear memory of an episode in which a teacher sexually abused him. He remembered the 'feeling of a hand coming into his trousers', the memory being accompanied by a physical sensation in the groin area consistent with such an act. He became upset and raised the matter with Dr. ----- who suggested this was not a major issue and advised him to leave it alone."
>
> However, from December 1996 as his relationship and business faltered, he became increasingly depressed and experienced a resurgence of disturbed

sleep and nightmares. The nightmares, which intermittently appeared with a frequency of two to three a year over the past 20 years, related to his school days and centred on themes of being bullied and running naked. Linking his depression, poor self-esteem and nightmares to the emerging memories of abuse, both sexual and physical, he disclosed the matter to Brother ------, Provincial, ----- Brothers Order.

He subsequently met with Fathers ------ and ------ who heard the disclosure in detail. They both stated, according to Mr. Saunders, that they would be supportive in informing the police, which Mr. Saunders did a week later. In his statement to the ------ Police, Mr. Saunders also names other students as victims of abuse. He stated that the victim status of these students was confirmed."

Conclusion: Mr. Saunders is a 36 year old man suffering chronic depression, anxiety, poor self-esteem and sexual dysfunctions. His affective state (depression and anxiety) in combination with his insecurity and poor self-confidence has impaired his capacity to form adequate interpersonal relationships with males and females to a marked extent, and his ability to deal effectively with a variety of life stresses. As a result, he sees himself as a failure and a worthless person."

There is no evidence to support a diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The episodes of sexual abuse were regarded as a positive experience even though in reality it was exploitative in nature. He was not threatened, terrified or repulsed by the advances. Accordingly, it does not meet the DSM-IV requirements of Criteria A for formal diagnosis of PTSD.

It was only later, and in response to peers bullying him and the physical punishment and public humiliation by teachers, that his confidence was undermined and that he became distressed, angry

and resentful. In this context, he re-interpreted the approaches of Brother ----- as exploitative. However, when the content of his preoccupation and intrusive thoughts are carefully analysed, it is the animosity toward the physical abuse applied by teachers and the bullying by peers that appears to be the main contributor to his sense of self-worthlessness and emotional distress."

Mr. Saunders perception is that his teachers humiliated and applied excessive punishment to him. This, in my view had a significant impact in detrimentally influencing his self-image and capacity to form adequate attachments later in life. He suffers anxiety and depression, a sense of inadequacy and interpersonal problems. On this basis, it is my view that he requires and should benefit, from psychological counselling. It should be noted that he has not received prior intensive psychotherapy.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Alex Blaszczynski

Honorary Professor Alex Blaszczynski has a PhD, Dip Psychol. and he is Chair in Psychology at the School of Psychology, The University of Sydney.

Australian Readers' Responses to the Psychological Report

John's story is the deepest betrayal of the immense trust vested in the Catholic Church and its representatives. Evil sexual predation on a ten year old boy has been manifestly compounded by a negation of the crime committed in reports designed to defend an institution of almost unimaginable power. Protection of the institution has been paramount, a little boy but an insignificant sacrifice to the maintenance of the corrupt 'integrity' of the church. Yet, just as sinister is the foiling of efforts by the victim

to uncover a vital report casting light on the Church and its minions.

Was the report unavailable because it was lost from the office of a professor of Psychology or just simply obfuscation hoping the victim would give up? John went from being sexually abused as a ten year old to suffer from bullying by teachers and other students later in his school career. The psychological report acknowledges a need for counselling but little more.

This is a cruel systematic attack on a vulnerable individual played out over his most formative years. John and many like him have suffered from the Church, the legal system and governments of the day. In my experience in the NSW Parliament there has been a startling ignorance by those MPs close to the Catholic Church of crimes of sexual abuse by members of that institution.

This type of crime must be exposed at all levels. A Royal Commission with sweeping powers is the only effective way to defend victims of past abuse and for our children in the future.

– Ian Cohen (former Greens MP, serving in the NSW Legislative Council from 1995 to 2011)

It seems to me to be a blatant attempt to dissociate the sexual abuse you suffered at the hands of the teacher from your later troubles. They do this using a form of logic that, on the surface, makes sense. You were abused. The abuse you suffered was not immediately interpreted by you (a young child, at the time) as abuse. You later attributed your behavioral issues to the abuse. Therefore, they conclude that the abuse was not 'necessarily' the cause of your behavioral issues, etc.

Effectively, they're attempting to inject a 'reasonable doubt' into the correlation – so that no one can legally conclude that your problems were DEFINITELY attributable to the abuse. It's a clever trick. Unfortunately, it's utter nonsense.

The fact remains that you were abused, and as far as I am aware – no one is disputing this. The fact that an abused child does not always immediately recognize that they have suffered abuse DOES NOT negate the fact that they were, in fact, abused. (If a woman, for example, was being beaten by her spouse but did not report it because she somehow felt she 'deserved it' – nobody would attempt to make the argument that she had not, in fact, been abused) Nor does it negate the likely consequences of such abuse. So I find the implied assertion quite ridiculous.

That you only later recognized the abuse as an underlying cause of your difficulties bears no relevance to the culpability of the perpetrators. I reject the notion that the failure of a then-10-year-old boy to properly identify abusive behavior somehow dissociates the act from some very obvious and logical psychological consequences."

– Lane

Having scrutinised the professor's report, it is disturbingly clear that he is out of touch with the depth of research that has gone into the issues of childhood sexual abuse. From a professional perspective, his diminution of the effects on John of the sexual abuse relative to the effects of bullying in high school, demonstrates a lack of knowledge of the far-reaching psychological consequences that are the result of childhood sexual abuse.

The conclusions that the professor draws begin to beg the questions: firstly, why have the effects of the sexual abuse been minimised, even though the report is detailed in describing the perpetrator's actions, including the frequency and duration of the abuse; and secondly, is this case yet another in the ever growing revelations of abdication of responsibility on the part of the Catholic Church corporation?

> I am left with great concerns as to the motives behind this report and can only trust that the current Australian Royal Commission, will not only bring to light the glaring deficiencies in the reporting and handling of institutionalised sexual abuse, but will implement lasting measures for change within these organizations.
>
> – John Russell, DMC. School Counsellor.

To read more responses and to add your own please visit http://sexualabusesurvivors.com.au

AUSTRALIA:

"John's story is the deepest betrayal of the immense trust vested in the Catholic Church and its representatives. Evil sexual predation on a ten year old boy has been manifestly compounded by a negation of the crime committed in reports designed to defend an institution of almost unimaginable power."

– Ian Cohen, former Greens MP, NSW Legislative Council (1995 to 2011)

"Trauma & abuse impacts the development of the brain. The brain is physically changed causing mental illness (including depression), poor emotional regulation and a difficulty in finding joy in life. If we suffered from cancer, help would be readily available and we would seek it out. Trauma also causes life-threatening changes. If it has happened to you or anyone you know, reach out and heal. As John says, it is well worth it."

– **Liz Mullinar**, CEO & founder, Heal For Life Foundation

"John's story is a mixture of tragedy, resilience, humour, and rage. He has taken the personal development path of the present, the new-age and therapy conscious ethos of the late twentieth century, to combat the Dickensian darkness of his childhood... This kind of childhood is part of our history as a nation, part of our struggle as men and women to be whole and it needs to be faced up to."

– **Steve Biddulph**, author of *Raising Boys* and *The New Manhood*

AMERICA:

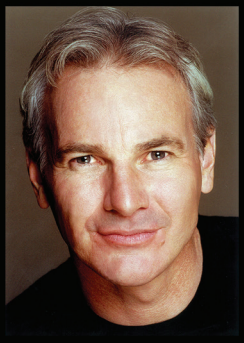
"John Saunders has written a deeply personal, idiosyncratic memoir. It is neither light nor easy reading. As he shares the process of one young man in early recovery from the effects of sexual child abuse, he opens his wounds for all to see."

– **Mike Lew**, author of *Victims No Longer*

Sexual Abuse Survivor's Handbook **tells with an open heart the story of a tragic upbringing involving sexual and physical abuse at school and at home. The book is an interwoven moving and insightful memoir, a healing help-guide for abuse survivors and a practical handbook for those wishing to confront their perpetrators through the justice system and seek compensation.**

John Saunders is a writer who brings his truth to the table wholeheartedly, who has travelled the road of abuse, confronted the Catholic Church for over 15 years and sought legal justice, healed deep wounds and here courageously given them a voice.

Sexual Abuse Survivor's Handbook **will lead the reader to a greater understanding of child abuse in our society, including the present and chronic Church and civil silencing of such abuse. John Saunders' brutally honest account encourages other survivors and witnesses of abuse to bravely speak out. Shame silences those who have been abused. Now someone is speaking up about it. Within this account stirs hope that healing and peace can be found despite the chaos. Read Sexual** ***Abuse Survivor's Handbook*** **and share John's journey; break the silence, heal the shame, spark a dialogue with your soul…**



Please help make this into a 'living document' for all survivors by going to http://sexualabusesurvivors.com.au to leave your thoughts & comments.

John Saunders was born in Australia and currently lives on the east coast of NSW. For the last 12 years he has run his own advertising business. He has written and performed a play on the topic of sexual abuse. This is John's first book.

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