

UPDATE 70

Royal Commission – Ballarat



Wednesday 20 May 2015 – Day 2

Day 2 of the Ballarat hearing heard more distressing evidence from survivors about the ongoing impact of the sexual abuse they suffered as children.

Gordon Hill lived at St Joseph's Orphanage in Ballarat from the age of three until he was 17. The orphanage was run by the Sisters of Nazareth. He described the sexual abuse he suffered while living at the orphanage including being first abused when he was five years old.

He also described harsh physical punishment at the hands of the nuns and other humiliating treatment and mental abuse. He told the Commission when he left St Joseph's he had no social skills, couldn't read or write or relate to people.

Neil Wileman was a full time boarder at St Patrick's College from 1972 following his parents' divorce. He described the sexual abuse he endured at the hands of Br Dowlan and Br Ring from the time he was 12.

He told the Commission Dowlan had abused him 2-3 times a week. He said it was difficult to tell anyone because of the fear, disgust and embarrassment he felt.

He reported the abuse to police in 1996. Dowlan was eventually charged with offences relating to Mr Wileman and 19 other boys.

Timothy Green gave evidence that Br Dowlan abused him while he was at St Patrick's College. Mr Green reported to police in 2014. Mr Green said 'it was common knowledge in students in my year that Dowlan was abusing many of the boys at the school'.

Mr Green told the Commission he had told then Father George Pell that boys were being abused. Cardinal Pell said in a statement released after Mr Green's evidence that he has no recollection of the conversation.

Mr **BAB** was one of eight children in a prominent Catholic family in Ballarat East. He was abused by his St Alipius Primary School teacher Br Fitzgerald in 1973 while in third grade. Because he refused further advances from Fitzgerald he suffered harsh physical abuse.

He said he didn't tell his parents because they were an integral part of the Catholic community and he didn't want to shake their faith.

David Ridsdale was abused by his uncle, Gerald Ridsdale when he was 11 in year 6. The abuse continued until he was 15. He described the power his uncle had over his family and community and the efforts he went to to groom his parents.

Mr Ridsdale told the Commission after having told the then Father Pell about the abuse, Fr Pell attempted to bribe him. Cardinal Pell said in a statement issued after today's evidence that at no time had he attempted to bribe David Ridsdale.

Helen Watson gave evidence about her son, Peter's experience, who was abused by a Catholic priest in the Ararat presbytery, Fr Paul David Ryan, who was eventually convicted of abusing other boys.

Peter did not disclose the abuse to his mother and for a number of years engaged in self-mutilation, alcohol and drug abuse and other out of character behavior. He was eventually diagnosed with schizophrenia.

After a period of being in and out of jobs and psychiatric hospitals he eventually took his own life, three years after telling his mother about the abuse.

Peter Blenkiron attended St Patrick's College Ballarat from the age of 11 as a day student.

He was routinely sexually abused by one of his teachers, Br Dowlan. He said he was aware that other boys were also being abused. He said he never told anyone while he was at St Patrick's and that it wasn't until the Ridsdale and Best cases were going through the courts that he began to talk about the abuse.

Full witness statements can be read at:

<http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au/royal-commission/case-study-28,-ballarat,-may-2015,/case-study-28-opening-and-witness-statements.aspx>

The hearing will continue tomorrow.

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