

# TRANSCRIPT

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations

Melbourne — 25 March 2013

#### Members

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#### Witness

Mr W. Davis.

**The CHAIR** — On behalf of the committee I welcome Mr Wayne Davis. Thank you for your willingness to appear before this hearing. I want to explain that all evidence taken by the committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the precincts of the hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege. If your evidence contains adverse comments or allegations about any individuals, I request that you do not refer to the name or names of those individuals during your evidence. If you do make an adverse reflection about a person and name them, I will need to suppress that evidence.

This hearing today is being recorded, and you will be provided with proof versions of the transcript. Following your presentation committee members will ask questions relating to the inquiry and your submission, which you have provided to us, thank you very much, and we look forward to hearing from you. Thank you very much for being before us this morning, Wayne. Please commence.

**Mr DAVIS** — Okay. As you know from my submission, in 1967 I was sent to Morning Star Boys' Home, run by the Franciscan Friars. I was told it was a holiday by the sea, and naturally, being 15, you believe it. The first thing that happened to me when I got there — I had lunch and then got punched in the mouth by a brother and told to dig. I put all that in my submission. The digging was — you were basically a human cultivator. You went six across, six back, up and down. You did not stop. I stopped and said, 'What do you want me to do now, Brother?'. He punched me again in the mouth. While we were doing these activities — that is, turning over the vegetable garden — they used to sneak up behind us, the brothers, and punch us in the kidneys until we urinated blood.

After about the first two weeks of this so-called therapeutic stuff, I became of the opinion that I had to get out of there. Two other guys and I tried to escape, and we were caught by other trainees at the centre, who were given extra privileges for catching us, and when they caught us they bashed us. That is part of the parcel down there. When we were locked in this dormitory thing, a brother came in and bashed me and sexually abused me — made me masturbate him. He had a brown robe on with beads around him. So not only were we getting bashed but I was getting abused as well. That made it even more certain that I was going to escape at the first opportunity, which I eventually did.

We escaped. Just before we went digging I had seen four guys bolting up the stairs, and I said, 'Where are you going?'. They said, 'We're going out'. So I tagged along. We escaped probably at 9 o'clock in the morning. We were caught around 10 o'clock that evening. I have nothing but praise for the police who picked us up. They went to fingerprint us because we were escapees, and when they opened my hands and put them on the fingerprint paper blood went everywhere because of the blisters all over my hands. They could not believe that, and then we told them about the kidneys. They did not believe us. They lifted all our shirts. Every one of us had bruised kidneys. We were all urinating blood, and we all had blisters all over our hands. We did not mention the sexual assault. I did not; I do not know about the others. I did not, because I was embarrassed by it. I could not tell anyone. They asked us what had happened. I told them everything bar that sexual thing.

They felt that sorry for us that they went out and got pizzas for us to feed us because we were so hungry; we had not eaten all day. They gave us a list of questions to ask them when they got on the stand when we went to the Children's Court, and that created an inquiry, which I will go on to shortly if that is all right.

After I got out of there I was an alcoholic by the time I was 16. I was 15 in Morning Star and Turana. I got out of there and I started drinking straightaway, and I was an alcoholic until I was 40 years old when I went through St Vincent's alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre to get off the grog. I have been a gambling addict. I have had just about everything go wrong that you can think could go wrong. I have hardly any friends; I cannot keep friendships. The relationship I am in now is the only one that has lasted any more than 12 months. I cannot hold down jobs. I cannot work anymore anyway because of health reasons, but before that I could not hold down jobs for any longer than two years. That is the longest I have ever held down a job.

That is basically it in a nutshell. I have had a pretty hard time for 45 years. I am as nervous as hell, but I am relishing this opportunity to finally have something to say. I have wanted it so badly. If I can read something I wrote out — it is only a page long — because I am as nervous as hell.

**The CHAIR** — That is okay. Just take your time, and please read it out.

**Mr DAVIS** — Firstly, I would like to thank the inquiry for allowing me to appear and tell of my experiences. As you would have read in my submission, I was abused sexually, physically and mentally when at Morning Star. I have suffered nightmares of those events for 45 years. As horrendous and traumatising as that has been, there is as much agony and trauma on top of that because of the denials of all concerned — church and government.

As the inquiry now knows, in 1967 after the escape from Morning Star an inquiry was held into the accusations I made of abuse at Morning Star. The inquiry was called by the director of social welfare, as it was then, and I was interviewed many times over approximately six weeks. I was told during this time, if any of the allegations contained sexual abuse, not to bother because no-one would believe me. At the end of this process of interviewing, I was told that everything that was said was believed and would be acted upon. I know that it was not, and that is what is destroying me. Every time I read or see on TV that some kid killed themselves because of abuse by people of all denominations and institutions, I feel guilty for not doing enough. I felt sure that, because I had told government officials about the abuse, a red flag had been raised and they would thoroughly investigate all institutional care in Victoria, but they did not.

After the interviewing procedure was finished, I was just forgotten about, hoping I would just go away. I was never offered any counselling, nor was I informed of my rights. I was obviously expendable. I have not to this day been told of anything about that so-called inquiry. The Victorian government made me suffer, just as the Catholics did, then and now. I have lived with this eating away at me for 45 years and hope by adding my story to this shameful affair I can at last find some peace in my life, though I doubt it.

What I would like to see come out of the inquiry is that any denomination or institution be held fully responsible for their actions, face substantial compensation plus medical and psychiatric costs of all abused children, not just sexual abuse but all abuse, and a genuine and sincere apology be given by church and institutions for what was done in their name. Finally I would like to think that, because of my absolutely shameful treatment by the government of Victoria for the past 45 years, I would without requesting be offered an unqualified and sincere apology and also compensation for the pain and suffering I have had to endure for the past 45 years and will endure for what remains of my life.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for sharing your story with us this morning and the elements in more detail in your written submission, which you have articulated very well in that submission. I note that in your concluding remarks you referred to substantial compensation, acknowledgement, medical costs — —

**Mr DAVIS** — Medical costs and psychiatric as part of that. We go through so much. I have had 45 years of dealing with this. Last night they re-ran a show on *60 Minutes* about George Pell, and I have to go through it again. I somehow feel guilty over every kid who has died since 1967. I know I am not, but I do feel it. I told these people; why did they not do something?

**The CHAIR** — When you were telling those people — telling the police — when you escaped — —

**Mr DAVIS** — The police told me the questions to actually get the inquiry started.

**The CHAIR** — Can you elaborate a little more on that?

**Mr DAVIS** — On the night of our arrest, in Collingwood police station the two policemen — I cannot remember their names; they would be on record somewhere — said, ‘We want to lock you little people up’, not in those words, ‘but we don’t want this to happen. That’s not what we’re about’. They could not believe the state we were in. We were out for only 12 or 14 hours. We were covered in blisters and wearing rags. The headline in the paper that day said it was torture, and it was torture. We were 15, and every single one of us was tortured. I was six weeks in that place, and not once did I get off gardening, not once did I get any canteen and not once did I see a TV. I had to sit straight back behind the TV. We all did, not just me. Those who did not earn the points, they did not see the TV. Everyone sat out there and watched the TV; I sat like that behind it for 2½ hours — no toilet, no nothing, and I sat there, and my back ached. Every part of me ached. That was done to every child, every young person, who went in that place.

Their games were sadistic. We played British bulldog where the priest would stand on a stage, pick a couple of his lads out, they would pick the ones who the priest had told, ‘Give him the most trouble’. I had my eyes

gouged, I was kneed in the groin, I was kicked by four or five of them while I was down. And it was not just me; it was everyone the priest — or the brother in this case — had a set on.

So getting back to the police, we told them all this, so they said, 'We want to get this out in the open'. They wrote five bits of paper — five of us escaped. I cannot talk about those other boys, and I do not want to because I have not seen them since. So what their feelings are about all this, I do not know. Those policemen wrote us out little notes and told us to remember what they had written and when they got on the stand at the Children's Court to ask them those questions but to memorise them, not have the paper, because they could get into trouble over it. So when they got up I remember one of the questions was, 'What condition were we in when you found us?'. They told them about the rags, we were starving, blisters, the bruised kidneys, blah, blah, blah. 'Could we have got in that condition in the amount of time we were out?' — 'No, it was impossible. They looked like they had been in the jungle for six months', was the answer. And so it went.

There was a newspaper reporter in the court. Can I say the name of the paper? It does not matter. He worked for a paper. He printed the headline, which you have got. The inquiry started. I myself was in Poplar House at that time, which was maximum security at Turana. This was, mind you, my first time ever in trouble. We were ferried up by car. We were given cakes, cans of soft drink, treated like wonderful people, and at the end of the process — goodbye. We were never told another thing, no counselling, no anything. The priest who assaulted us — or the brother who had assaulted me, anyway, terribly — 'Oh, yes. Well, under the law you've got a right to sue that brother'. It was not getting the government or the department into trouble. I was not told those rights. It has taken until last year to get the Catholic Church to give me a piddling, and I mean a piddling, for what I have suffered, which I have got, a one-fits-all apology from them in there. They just change a couple of names and give it to every single one of us. I have wanted this day for 45 years.

**The CHAIR** — Wayne, I know this is difficult, but thank you very much for that explanation.

**Mrs COOTE** — Thank you, Wayne.

**Mr DAVIS** — It is all right.

**Mrs COOTE** — I hope we are not as scary as you thought we would be.

**Mr DAVIS** — No, you guys are not; it is me.

**Mrs COOTE** — It is very helpful to have this. To hear of your experience is poignant and very helpful, so thank you. I would like to talk about that letter which you have given in the appendix, which is from Paul Smith from the Franciscan Friars, of 16 July last year.

**Mr DAVIS** — Yes.

**Mrs COOTE** — As you say, it is almost like a stock letter that everyone would get.

**Mr DAVIS** — Yes.

**Mrs COOTE** — What was your reaction when you got this and the time frame about that? What did you actually feel when you got this letter?

**Mr DAVIS** — I read two lines of it and threw it in a drawer.

**Mrs COOTE** — So it did not go anywhere to even addressing some of the issues that you personally felt? So they had not taken any time to get to know your personal circumstances?

**Mr DAVIS** — No, they do not want to know.

**Mrs COOTE** — But on the other hand they probably feel that — —

**Mr DAVIS** — They do know.

**Mrs COOTE** — They probably feel that that is a letter that is going to stand up.

**Mr DAVIS** — Yes.

**Mrs COOTE** — But from your point of view it is a standard letter and does not really address the issues that are so important to you, obviously.

**Mr DAVIS** — It does not say sorry anywhere there. It does say sorry, but it is not meant. If you read that thorough — I have read it many times now — there is no actual apology in there. They are saying that the person is deceased. In other words, if you put my spin on it: ‘The guy is deceased; leave us alone. Sorry’.

**Mrs COOTE** — You think this is more a letter for themselves than actually being addressed to you?

**Mr DAVIS** — They have to give one out, so there it is. They would change a couple of names and print it out again.

**Mrs COOTE** — Do you think that, because it was 16 July last year, it had something to do with the climate of sexual abuse that was going on and so therefore they felt they had to give you a letter at that time?

**Mr DAVIS** — Yes. They actually do not know about the sexual abuse. I still have nightmares and suffer PTSD and ongoing psychological things. I do not even know the full extent of it. I cannot tell you what it was. I do not know. I have nightmares that I do not remember. I wake up 2 feet away from my bed; I throw myself out of bed kicking and screaming. If I can say the words — no, I will not; they are rude — ‘Eff off, eff off, leave me alone, you C!’. That is all people can understand; the rest is a guttural growl. I do not know what happened. We have not got to that stage with my psychologist yet. And if you reckon that is going to cover an apology, they want to think again.

**Mrs COOTE** — Thank you very much indeed.

**Mr DAVIS** — Thank you.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — Do you know what happened to any of the other boys you were at Morning Star with? I know you said you had not had any contact with the ones who also gave evidence about how you had been treated, but have you had any contact with any other boys who were there when you were there?

**Mr DAVIS** — Yes.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — Do you know what their circumstances are?

**Mr DAVIS** — They received the same treatment as I did. I do not know about the sexual abuse.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — But what about now? What are they sort of doing now?

**Mr DAVIS** — The one I do see lives in Dookie. I do not know whether you know where that is; it is over near Shepparton. He trains greyhounds. I am not going to mention his name; I do not know whether he wants me to or not. He is not too happy about things, but he just gets on with it. I want justice. I want it for me, but I also want it for a lot of other people, too.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — In your submission you also say that when you left Morning Star you were not the same kid as when you went in there.

**Mr DAVIS** — No.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — Could you explain a little bit more about what you mean by that?

**Mr DAVIS** — I continued on with my drinking once I got out. I became an extremely violent person. I was absolutely certain no-one was going to stand over and beat me up again. I used one of these one night to bash a bloke and glassed him in the face with it. That is the sort of person I became because of this, and I was like that for many, many, many years. The things I have done — I just do not want to go there. I became a dog because of their treatment.

I am getting treatment for that now. Thankfully I do not do that sort of thing now. I live a very quiet life. As I said, I have had one relationship that has finally stuck; it appears as though it is going to stay. You can count my friends on one hand; I cannot keep friendships. I could not keep relationships until now. I could not keep jobs.

There are times when I do not even want to speak to my partner; I want to be by myself, totally. I cannot speak to anyone because of this.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — What sort of a boy were you before you went in there do you think? Were you quiet?

**Mr DAVIS** — I was your average cheeky 15-year-old. I got into trouble for illegal use of a motor car. There was a gang of us and we nicked a Mini Minor. That was it. I had never been charged. I was never a violent person. I was actually a Victorian schoolboy swimming champion. I was very good at that sort of stuff. I do not think I have been swimming since then; I certainly have not been to the beach, I know that. I do not go anywhere anymore. I do not go to the movies. I do not go fishing. I do not go anywhere. I am just stuck. All my memories are just shot. I do not have too many happy memories of the last 45 years, I can tell you.

**Ms HALFPENNY** — Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Wayne, it might be too difficult to express a view but in relation to the counselling, do you think if you had had counselling earlier after the abuse — —

**Mr DAVIS** — I have no doubt about it.

**The CHAIR** — it might have averted some of the behaviour that you — —

**Mr DAVIS** — Yes, I have no doubt about it. The counselling I have had recently with a guy by the name of Geoff Berger — he is a wonderful man — has at least got me to somewhere stable in my life. He has classed me with very high PTSD, the same as Vietnam vets. It is so deeply locked away that my body is not willing to let it out. So if I had received some counselling and treatment in 1967, yes, I would have been a different person.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Thanks, Wayne, for coming before us.

**Mr DAVIS** — You are right, mate.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — The *Truth* article you provided is also very helpful. It gives a basis from which we and others can try to investigate what happened.

**Mr DAVIS** — I did that simply because of the denials that have been going on; nobody knew anything about any of this for 45 years.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Yes, it mentions that there was going to be an inquiry. I cannot tell you what the outcome is, but at least you started it.

**Mr DAVIS** — Well, I was in it, and I do not know what the outcome of it was.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Yes, I know. Thank you for coming forward. I congratulate you on getting your life together as you have and for having the courage to come forward. Similar to the Chair and Ms Halfpenny's questions, we have heard some things from people who have been through that boys' home and other boys' homes. Are you able to tell us — you do not have to name names; you can if you want to if they are otherwise in the public domain — how other people have turned out, how this brutalised you in your subsequent years and how you have come to where you are now?

**Mr DAVIS** — I know very few of those I knew leading up to when I gave up the life of crime, I suppose I would call it. I got out of Castlemaine jail when I was 20, about two months before my 21st birthday. I swore I would never get pinched again, and I have not. I was doing five years. I did two and got three years parole, was let out. I have never been in trouble since. It has not stopped me being an idiot; I got away with a lot.

Every person I knew from Morning Star from 1967 to when I got out of there, if I was ever incarcerated with any of them, they were exactly the same as me — very, very angry and violent. You would do anything. You became fearless. Nothing else could hurt you that bad — nothing. Pentridge did not worry me. My cell faced out to Castlemaine and I heard a party and people enjoying themselves and I said, 'I've never had that; I want to try it'. I tried it and I liked it so I have stayed out of trouble.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Just to be fair and to put it in context, you have told us that you were also at Turana.

**Mr DAVIS** — Yes.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — That is now closed as well. It also had a history, but perhaps it is your assessment that it was not as bad as Morning Star.

**Mr DAVIS** — Turana was kindergarten.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — As best you can, could you go through that distinction for us, and particularly how the Morning Star boys have come out of it as opposed to others in other institutions?

**Mr DAVIS** — I cannot line them up from other institutions. I know Bayswater Boys' Home was severe; I met a couple of guys who changed their religion to go to Catholic homes and got the same cop down there. I heard Bayswater Boys' Home was extremely severe as well. I do not know that for a fact; I never went there.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Just Turana and Morning Star then, if you could.

**Mr DAVIS** — Turana was comfortable. I started a trade at Turana — painting. Once I got out of maximum security at Poplar House, I went up to Red Gables and spent the remaining six or seven months there. I worked in a painting crew, which I continued — tried to — when I got out; I could not hold any job. But I never tried to escape; I was in an open section. I was treated fairly. I was fed well, I was given decent clothes, I got a visit every week and I had a cigarette. I did not smoke before I went to Morning Star. You could not compare the two — chalk and cheese.

The only thing I can work out in their defence — and I am not trying to defend them — is they wanted to break us to nothing and build us up into these perfect little clones of themselves. That is the only thing I can come up with as to why there was violence. I do not know. All their sports were violent. It rained one day when we were digging the garden and we thought we would get the day off. They made us run around a gymnasium all day. If you slowed down, you were punched. For an attempted escape I was made to run around the garden, which was as big as this entire building, with about three pairs of extra socks, extra shirts and an oversized pair of gumboots. You kept running in the heat until you were told to stop, unless you collapsed, in which case they put you back on the fork and you ran it again another day until they were satisfied you had done it. In basketball, if you passed the ball in the wrong direction, you got whacked for it. I do not know any other form of life anywhere that treats people like that. Prison was not like that. I went to prison too. I was never treated like that in jail, but I was treated like that down there.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Thank you for that answer.

**Mr DAVIS** — That is quite okay.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Wayne. Can I just ask one other question of you? I think you said at the start of your evidence that you were an alcoholic by the age of 16?

**Mr DAVIS** — Yes. The first time I picked up a drink.

**The CHAIR** — But you went to Morning Star Boys' Home at 15 — —

**Mr DAVIS** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — For 12 months, so the drinking did not start in there.

**Mr DAVIS** — Until I got out.

**The CHAIR** — When you got out; that is when it started. Thank you.

**Mr DAVIS** — My brain could not cope with what was going on.

**The CHAIR** — That was an escape for you, the alcohol?

**Mr DAVIS** — Yes. The gambling was too. As soon as poker machines came here I blew over half a million dollars. I was run over by two trucks and got a huge payout and lost half of it through the pokies. What was my life worth? To these dogs, nothing. That is why I want something done about them. That is why I want some recognition somewhere along the line that I tried to do something about them way back then. Otherwise what do I do — die and it has all been for nothing? I want something for me out of it, but what about the rest of the kids after me? The lady who was before me — 35 years — she was abused by a priest. I was 45 years. For 10 years they had known that these people were paedophiles. God knows what they were, just violent mongrels, but nothing was done. I need something done.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for coming forward today and for sharing your story with us. Like many other victims, you have shared many difficult stories, and we appreciate that. On behalf of the committee, I thank you again.

**Mr DAVIS** — Thank you very much.

**The CHAIR** — The evidence has been most helpful.

**Witness withdrew.**