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Family and community development committee

Parliament House,

Spring St,

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Victoria 3002

**Re: Victorian inquiry into handling of child abuse by religious and other nongovernment organisations.**

To whom it may concern,

At 11 years of age I was classified as uncontrollable by the Children's Court and placed in care at the Billabong section of Turana. This came about as I was constantly running away from my parents' home. Due to the fact that my parents were constantly fighting with each other I started running away at 8yrs old. My father was regular army and mother used to make Christmas crackers (bon bons) at home. I believe most of the arguments by my parents were money problems.

From Turana, I was sent to St Augustine's Orphanage Geelong, which was run by the "Christian Brothers". Before leaving Turana I was issued with a suit case of new clothes, shoes and toiletries. On arrival at St Augustine's the case was taken from me and I was issued used clothing and boots, the boots didn't fit properly and hurt my feet, when I complained about the boots I was told by the brother that I would have to get used to them. The only thing issued to me from the suitcase was a comb toothbrush and dressing gown. I became attached to my dressing gown as I used to wear it to bed of a night to keep me warm. The toothbrush was very important to me also as if you lost it you would not be issued with a new one and would have to clean your teeth with your finger. We would line

up each morning and the brother would issue toothpaste onto each of our toothbrushes or finger. At the end of the week the brother would check our teeth and depending on how good our teeth were we were given credit to spend on lollies at the canteen, one of the boys had no front teeth and would get no credits to spend at the canteen on Saturday. A few of us would give him a couple of lollies each although this was against the rules and we would face getting the cuts (strap) We were brothers in arms and stuck together. I can't remember much about my time at St Augustine's I do remember being lonely cold hungry and scared of the Christian brothers and some of the older bully boys.

At Christmas I was released back to the care of my parents at my mother's request. After the school holidays, I started at the local state school. Everything seemed ok with my parents for a while but soon the fighting started up again and seemed to get worse, I couldn't concentrate at school and felt out of place and ashamed about having done time in care. I soon started waging school and running away from home again, I felt my parents were fighting because of me.

When I ran away I'd steal people's milk and bread money as in those days bread and milk was home delivered and paid for by leaving the money in a breadbox on the front porch or in milk bottles.

It wasn't long before the police caught up with me I was charged with theft and returned to Turana. I was placed back at Billabong. I didn't mind being at Billabong, here for some reason I felt safe and secure, I missed my freedom and family but at least I didn't have to sleep under a bridge or try to find a way of getting a feed as I had to when I ran away from home.

Once again from Turana I was sent back to the "care" of the "Christian" Brothers this time it was St Vincent's Orphanage Sth Melbourne. It was here that I was witness to and suffered brutality, food deprivation verbal abuse and assaults committed by the Christian brothers. The thing that really gets to me even to this day is the fact that at St Vinnies there were homies and orpho's, homies were kids like me who were placed in care for playing up, then there were the orpho's who were placed in care because they were abandoned by their parents or had no parents at all. We all suffered the same abuse; I think the poor orpho's suffered worse because they were preyed upon more because they had nobody to turn to for help. I still feel sad for these poor souls. I can remember of a night in bed some of the kids used to rock from side to side to get to sleep I can only imagine the suffering and heartache these orpho's were put through.

After about 6mths I had enough of the bully shit that was going on at St Vinnies and decided to run away as by doing so I hoped to be sent back to Turana. I was caught in Albury and to my disappointment was sent back to St Vincent's. I had to face Brother M the head brother, who slapped me hard across the face a number of times then I was made to bend over his desk and was given 6 cuts (strap) on the arse and told that I was a worthless little criminal.

For the next few days I couldn't sit down without pain, that didn't bother me as much as being slapped across the face; I was on the boxing team, we would go to festival hall and other boys clubs to compete against other boys, to me being slapped across the face was a real insult, I'd rather have been hit with a fist. From the day I was returned to St Vinnies after running away brother M had it in for me and any minor breach of the rules I was dealt with severely. I remember one evening during boxing training our regular trainer was away, he was not a Christian brother. Brother M was taking us for training, when it came to my turn to spar he put me up against J.P who was much heavier than I was, every time he hit me I saw stars, at the end of the bout I was black and blue and could hear ringing in my ears, this was brother's M way of getting back at me for the embarrassment I had caused him by running away. Jack our regular trainer would never put two fighters together with such a difference in weight knowing that to do so the smaller fighter could sustain serious damage. In all my time in "care" Jack was one of the very few people I had any respect for, he was a gentleman with a good heart, he taught me not only how to defend myself but also to have compassion and understanding for my fellow man.

My schooling at St Vincent's was nothing short of horrendous. I had three teachers, all were "Christian" brothers each as brutal and vicious as the other. Brother T would sit behind us in class, if you caused any disturbance in any way you could expect to have your head banged against the head of the person sitting next to you, this meant that even if you were innocent you were still punished.

Brother T used his strap at what seemed to be any chance he could as did most of the brothers.

Brother H another so called teacher of mine was a master at giving the strap. The strap consisted of three strips of leather sewn together 300mm long 20mm wide 15mm thick. The brother's tunic was made with a pouch to store the strap in, so it was never out of their reach. What sort of organization makes clothes to accommodate such a weapon? Surely not a Christian Organization! Or so you would think. Brother H would hold the strap in his right hand raise it high above his head, with his left hand hold the tip of the strap back behind his head leap into the air bring down the strap on to the palm of your hand with such force that on contact with your hand the strap would curl around and strike the front of your hand, leaving a swollen blue and red mark. Brother H would throw things at you if he couldn't be bothered walking over to you to wack you on the back of the head with his hand. He would pick up whatever was at hand and throw it at you, blackboard duster books chalk or his tea cup. I remember once being hit in the eye by the blackboard duster and thinking how lucky I was that it wasn't his cup or a book. Brother H would also bend you over his table and wack you on your ass with the blackboard ruler. This happened to me more times than I remember.

As the orphanage was overcrowded some of the boys had to sleep on mattresses on the floor. The two classrooms were full and a group of about 8 of us went out to St Peter and

Paul school. The teacher here was brother O. Before the bell to finish school for the day brother O would give us our homework to be done by the beginning of the next day. The next day he'd line us up and randomly ask questions about the homework, the first boy didn't make any mistakes so brother O move down line until he came to my friend. Peter tried to explain why he had not done his homework; as he was on kitchen duty the night before. While trying to explain brother O struck Peter with a closed fist to the stomach, Peter buckled over and was pushed to the floor, brother O then started hitting Peter on the legs at least 20 times in a fit of rage, Peter was screaming in pain from the strap coming in contact with his bare skin. This brutal assault lasted a couple of minutes. I wanted to do something to make brother O stop, but I was frozen in fear. I've never forgiven myself for not doing something to stop this assault on my best friend. This was the breaking point for me. I had to get out of this HELL HOLE!!!

I thought of running away again but the chances were that once again I would be returned back here. The only chance I had of being sent back to Turana was to commit a crime. I knew this would work. I had heard of a couple of homies getting caught breaking into a house and being sent to Turana.

By this time [REDACTED] my younger brother had been made a state ward also, and was sent to St Vincent's; he was 2 years younger than me. A few months later the opportunity to get sent back to Turana Presented itself.

One day after reading comics at the local newsagent I noticed the keys to the shop were in the lock of the door, on my way out of the shop I snatched the keys and put them in my pocket. [REDACTED] was with me at the time and I told him of my plan to come back to the shop that night to rob it. To cut a long story short we robbed the shop that night, we were caught a few days later and we were both sent back to Turana. [REDACTED] went to Billabong and I went to Quamby a lockup section at Turana.

After a few months I was transferred to Green Gables an open section of Turana, from here at the age of 15 I was released from the care of The State Ward Branch and started making a living for myself.

I believe any institution where crimes have been proven to have been committed against children, should be sold off, along with the proceeds from previous sales of institutions involved in these crimes; the monies collected from these sales placed in a trust for the use of any and all care leavers and any child in need of assistance.

From what I experienced and witnessed in care, I am still screaming inside.

Best wishes with the inquiry.

Greg.