

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations

Mr Christopher Richey

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## **SUBMISSION CONTENT:**

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I was a student at St Josephs College Pascoe Vale between 1969 and 1971, during that period I was a witness to such brutality and emotional cruelty that I fled the school in fear for my own well being. While I do not lay claim to being an academically excellent student I am no dummy either, but when faced with teaching Brothers who are not fit to teach, violent, impatient and totally unwilling to assist a student who has asked for help with material that they should be teaching. Then I have valid reasons for doing what I did.

One brother spoke so softly that he was almost totally inaudible. I asked to be moved closer to the front of the classroom to hear him but even then I struggled to understand what he was saying. Another would race through math classes. When asked for clarification on a algebraic problem his only response was "Just keep up son I'm not going to hold up the whole class up just to explain something to you." On another occasion when told that I was having difficulties keeping up with a subject his reply was simply "What do you think I am".

The school principal Brother Weston seemed more interested in his school prestige than he was in the well-being or education of his students. He gave me the strap once after returning from school holidays for no stated reason at all. On another occasion I had been attacked and bashed by a gang on a rail station while on my way home from school, the following morning Brother Weston strapped me for bringing the schools name into disrepute by being involved in a fight. I was not a violent person at all nor was I ever a troublemaker or bully of any kind; I always tried hard in class and was never disruptive. I had been the victim of bullying at primary school. the kind of violent discipline being dealt out at this school simply did not make sense and simply made me fear my teachers. Another Brother , Brother McCabe frequently flew into fits of rage that were so terrifying I did not dare to speak or ask questions in his class. He was my English teacher. At one point I witnessed the bashing of another student in my own class by Brother McCabe. The school's principal, Brother Weston, came to our classroom the following morning and told us that anyone who reported this incident would face expulsion and that no other catholic school would take them in "I will see to that" he boasted. I became so intimidated by what I had seen that I fled the school, it was easier to simply stay away from the school than to attend, I did not feel safe there. The same principle made the following statement to me when my parents brought me back to school several weeks later, I stated then that I did not want to attend this school anymore. The principal's response was "No other Catholic school will have you and no state school will have you either, stay here and we will sort this out". I returned to school but the same teacher who bashed that other boy was still there and still teaching. In fact nothing had changed. I ran away again. I still did not want to return to that school so I elected to go to a technical school

instead the only option offered, missing my opportunity to sit my HSC and any hope of entering university. I had hoped to study arts/music. I am currently putting myself through university at my own expense and in my own time. I am studying towards a Bachelor of communications.

My parents were horrified and believed that the Christian Brother could do no wrong, that I must have done something and that I was responsible for all of this happening to me and in a strange way I accepted this for many years without understanding why, and sinking further and further into depression and my own inability to deal with the issues that related to my lack of education and any qualifications. For many years I lived with guilt that my own lack of education was because I was too stupid to learn.

I sought help at a counselling service and attended on a weekly basis for two years but this was fruitless, my mistake was that it was a catholic service and did not want to deal with the issues in any real sense. I was also still too ashamed of what I saw as my own failure at that time. Years later when I sought to gain access to my records from that same service in order to attend another counsellor, I was advised that the service had closed down and all its record destroyed on legal advice.

I believe that no report was made to the education department of my truancy. The principal had no desire to draw the attention of the authorities to the matter and subsequently to the calibre of his teaching staff.

it wasn't until the 1980's and the exposure of the violence and brutality of many Christian Brothers that I began to realise that I may not have been the problem and that I was not alone. Other Catholics had begun to relay stories of brutality and fear while attending catholic schools. But the sad fact was that in Catholic circles they were not believe and on one occasion while attending at a youth group I witnessed a boy who was talking about the abuse he had suffered at the hands of a Christian Brother, another person there jumped to his feet and began to shout at him "How dare you denigrate the good name of the Christian Brothers" over and over and continued to the point where his the victim was forced to depart, in tears, from the building as this was the only thing that stopped the person shouting at him.