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CONTACT REPORT

On Behalf of: Mrs. Varlie Fifis,

[Redacted]

The interview upon which this report is based took place at Varlie's home on Monday, 24th October, 2011. Varlie and the interviewer were the only ones present. In lodging this complaint, Varlie speaks for her son, Jon, who died suddenly on [Redacted], 2011, aged fifty four years.

Jon's father, Eugene Charles Jean Fifis was born in Bandung, Java, Indonesia, on [Redacted] 1924. His parents were of Dutch origin, and Eugene, at seventeen and a half, became a serving member of the Dutch Army. He underwent three and a half years of incarceration as a prisoner of war – as did all other members of his family. Eugene's health suffered greatly, and upon release he was very thin and could not walk. He spent six months in Singapore Hospital before being repatriated back to Holland, and emigrated to Australia in 1952.

Upon arrival, Eugene worked on a fruit block at Mildura, which was owned by an Australian friend he'd made in P.O.W. camp. This was followed by time in Queensland, working at the Ford Factory in Geelong, and then selling life insurance to migrants. It was in 1954 that Eugene was offered, by his sister, a TAA flight to Sydney. He accepted this offer and during the flight met Varlene Alice Egan (Varlie) who was an Air Hostess with TAA. Eugene was very impressed with Varlie and wrote a most complimentary letter to TAA. A copy of the letter found its way to Varlie who had been transferred to Brisbane. So began a period of correspondence, followed by Eugene's proposal of marriage. Eugene and Varlie were married on 28th May, 1955.

After marrying, Eugene and Varlie lived in Melbourne, and Eugene worked for Shell as a clerk. In due course four children were born: Jon (D.O.B. [Redacted], 1956); [Redacted]; [Redacted]; [Redacted]. Varlie describes Eugene as "a strict father, but also very loving and caring".

Jon began school at St. Mary's, Thornbury, in 1962. He was there for only a few months and then, as the family moved, he continued his primary schooling at St. Peter's, Clayton, conducted by the Brigidine Sisters. Jon remained there until 1968. Varlie reports that Jon enjoyed the time at St. Peter's apart from one older female teacher who used a steel ruler to discipline the students.

Signed..... [Redacted]

Date..... 8. 11. 2011

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Jon's secondary schooling began at the Salesian College, Chadstone, in 1969. He completed Year 7 and 8 (Form 1 and 2) at the Salesian College and then began Form 3 in February, 1971, at Mazenod College, conducted by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Jon was expelled from Mazenod in August or September, 1971, and completed what was left of that year at Taylor's Business College. He completed his secondary education at Westall High School. What has been summarised in this paragraph will be commented upon in more detail later in this report.

Varlie reports that Jon actually left home when he was sixteen. She states that "Jon was always a troubled boy" and that she discovered later in his life that he had been 'taking drugs' from the age of fourteen. Upon leaving home, states Varlie – with tears in her eyes – Jon "flatted and bummed around". "We never knew where he was. He drifted in and out of our lives". Varlie states "Eugene would never enter into any discussion about Jon". To this day she does not know why.

When Jon was twenty years old Eugene died. He had a serious heart condition and actually died on the operating table. Varlie was left to bring up the children alone. She says, "Jon was around for his 21st birthday, but he was still basically out of our family life". She continues, "Jon was twenty three when, in November, 1979, he arrived home on a motor bike. He was always falling off the bike and having accidents, because he was 'high on something'. He said to me, 'Please drive me to the airport to go to Odyssey House' – this was a drug rehabilitation centre in Campbelltown, N.S.W. Odyssey House opened at Eltham, Melbourne, in 1979 and Jon spent two and a half years at Odyssey on this occasion and another year and a half at a later time".

When Jon was 25/26 he spent time at Vipassana – a retreat house in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales. The central exercise at Vipassana was 'meditation'. Varlie recalls Jon commenting on his time there "it only served to stir the muddy waters". At that time Varlie had no idea what Jon meant.

Jon continued his 'drifting life'. His employment history is well summed up by his sister, [REDACTED], who gave the eulogy at Jon's Requiem Mass. "Jon was a painter and decorator, a flight attendant for Ansett, he held a degree in Legal Studies and worked for Legal Aid, he had a computer repair business, was a scuba diver instructor and a professional busker – but really he was a Troubadour, a wandering minstrel, known on the Gold Coast as Jonny-Dot-Com".

Signed..... [REDACTED] Date..... 8. 11. 2011

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The reference to the Gold Coast relates to a full ten year period (1998 – 2008) when Jon had no contact at all with his family. Regarding the reference to Legal Studies, Varlie explained that Jon had completed the degree at Latrobe University, Melbourne, but “that was it” – he didn’t pursue that line of endeavour any further.

As stated above, Varlie’s husband, Eugene, died many years ago [REDACTED] 1977. Varlie never remarried but did develop a close relationship with [REDACTED], who lived elsewhere in Melbourne. During that time Jon lived with her at Carnegie for three and a half years and in that time completed his Legal Studies Degree. Varlie says the tension was absolutely terrible and when [REDACTED] was diagnosed with terminal cancer, she was not able to care for them both and asked Jon to leave. This was when Jon left for Queensland and started the virtual lack of contact, although before Varlie lost contact she made monthly payments into his bank for six months, for the rent on a warehouse to run his computer repair business – plus \$500 towards a car.

“Then one day”, relates Varlie, “quite out of the blue, my son [REDACTED] and they came upon Jon busking in the street. This began a period of reconciliation between the two brothers”.

[REDACTED]

A more general family reconciliation occurred when [REDACTED] was about to celebrate her 50th birthday. She sent a ticket to Jon at the Gold Coast asking him to come, because, as she explained, “How could I have my 50th birthday without my beloved brother”. Jon came home and never returned to Surfers Paradise. Varlie explains, “Jon was found accommodation with the organisation Wintringham, and was allocated a room at 4/104-106 Alexander Rd., Flemington. He lived alone there until the day of his death. He was found dead on [REDACTED] 2011. He died of a brain haemorrhage”.

Jon was a very ill man. He had neglected his health through the years and had been diagnosed with [REDACTED]. His body had suffered greatly from the illegal drug taking but also the large amount of prescribed medication he absorbed. As well, during his stay at the Gold Coast he suffered a violent attack from a man whose girl friend Jon was attempting to protect from him. He sustained severe injuries.

Despite his failing health, Jon had become involved in several ‘communities’. [REDACTED] makes grateful reference in her eulogy to: The Morning Bells Choir, The Choir of Hard Knocks, The Ozanam Community, Wintringham, Landmark Education and Matchworx. Jon played an active role in these communities where his talents and his gentleness were very much appreciated.

Signed [REDACTED] Date 8.11.2011

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Varlie reports that she and Jon had almost daily telephone contact after he moved to Flemington. She states, "On 29th July I was watching the television when Jon rang. I asked him to hold a few moments because I was interested in the news item about the sentencing of Brother Robert Best for sexual assault of young boys".

"I was stunned and staggered", continues Varlie, "when Jon said 'that happened to me twice - two priests, [redacted] and [redacted]'. Never before had Jon made any reference to anything like that. It was literally only six days later that Jon was found dead in his room". Varlie states that in that brief period she had only two conversations with Jon which revealed some of what had been troubling him. However, the details are quite sketchy.

When Jon began his secondary schooling at Salesian College, Chadstone he seemed to be put out of class quite a lot – for disruptive behaviour, Varlie thinks. Father [redacted] saw him there and invited him back to his office. Varlie quotes Jon as stating, "Father [redacted] said to me, 'You're doing Judo, aren't you? I'd like you to bring your outfit, put it on and show me'. It seems, says Varlie, that this 'ceremony' happened on three or four occasions. Varlie says that Jon did not accuse Father [redacted] of touching him or doing anything else to him.

Coming towards the end of Jon's Form 2 year the school recommended that Eugene and Varlie look for another school for Jon to attend. It was in December, 1970, that Varlie made contact with Father [redacted] at Mazenod College. Varlie states that she poured out all her concerns about Jon and what she perceived as his problems. She says she remembers saying that "Jon was always a square peg in a round hole".

"Father [redacted] showed such empathy, I thought he was the answer to my prayers and to Jon's problems", says Varlie. She continues, "He said, 'oh well, in the school holidays I'll drop in and pick him up and we'll go for a drive in the country. We'll lie in the grass and look up at the clouds". This took place and Varlie thought all was well.

In July 1971 Jon was disciplined by Father [redacted]. Jon explained to his parents, "I had to drop my pants to be strapped". Eugene's response was, "You must have deserved it". Varlie's response was to go to the school and challenge Father [redacted]. "How dare you drop my son's pants. Where were you standing when his pants came down?" Varlie states that she didn't get an answer. She said to Father [redacted], "Do you know they're calling you a 'poofter' in the playground?" It wasn't until July, 2011, when Jon said, "that happened to me", that these happenings made sense to Varlie. Referring to Father [redacted], Jon said to his mother "He pulled my dick out". Varlie does not know if this took place on the car trip to the fields, or when Jon had his pants dropped.

Signed [redacted] Date 8.11.2011

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"It was in August, 1971", states Varlie. "The school was in a development stage and building was going on. One morning, several boys arrived early at school, had access to the site office and used the phone to order a load of sand. Jon was one of the boys but not the ring-leader. The sand was delivered and the boys were expelled. A meeting with parents and a representative of the Catholic Education Office was held. All the boys were reinstated, except Jon.

Eugene and Varlie tried to enrol Jon at Westall High School. A reference was needed from Mazenod. Father [redacted] recommendation to Westall was "do not accept him, do not touch him". Varlie reports that Father [redacted], who knew the family well, and was their Parish Priest, recommended that Westall accept Jon – they did. Varlie asks "Why was Father [redacted] so strongly against Jon?" There is so much that Varlie does not know.

Varlie states that on the Tuesday before Jon died, they had a really wonderful conversation. She had wondered why Jon didn't reveal the sexual assault allegations when the events took place. It seems that Jon said he was too embarrassed and felt too guilty. Varlie doesn't have more details about what happened because, as she said, "I didn't want to pry". Varlie was waiting for, and expecting Jon to be more forthcoming a little down the track. His sudden death prevented that. In hindsight Varlie commented that Jon always expressed his disgust of homosexuality and that he couldn't stand violence against women. Although Jon had some close relationships with women through his life, none of them persisted. He never married.

The booklet prepared for Jon's Requiem Mass describes him as 'our beautiful, elegant and gentle son, brother, uncle and friend. Jon was clearly all of these, but he also was a very troubled man. Many factors contributed to this. Varlie believes strongly that the sexual abuse by Father [redacted] and Father [redacted] was a major negative and destructive influence on Jon.

In the brief period since Jon's death and funeral, Varlie has considered what to do about Jon's revelation. She consulted her brother in Adelaide and also Father [redacted] who presided at the Requiem Mass. She followed Father [redacted] advice and contacted St. Patrick's Cathedral. Varlie says that she received quite a cool response but it was suggested that she contact Towards Healing. Varlie did that and she speaks highly of the compassion and real empathy shown by Kerry Buchecker, Director of Towards Healing, Victoria, and Renata Byra, Secretary. Hence this report.

Signed..... [redacted] Date..... 8.11.2011

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What does Varlie hope may be achieved through this process?

In Varlie's own words: "They violated him in his growing years".

"I want, no I NEED acknowledgment from the Salesians concerning the questionable behaviour of Father [REDACTED] regarding Jon, and from the Oblates concerning the sexual assault by Father [REDACTED] perpetrated on Jon."

"How could one of their very own community do such a thing to my son?"

"I NEED TO LOOK THEM IN THE EYE AND SEE GENUINENESS IN THEIR APOLOGY"

Varlie is not seeking any form of financial compensation.

SHE NEEDS ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND A GENUINE APOLOGY

Signed.....[REDACTED]..... Date..... 8.11.2011.....

Varlie

From: Shane Wall [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 13 December 2011 8:42 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: Varlie Fifs

Shane Wall
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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From: Frank Moloney [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 12 December 2011 4:07 PM
To: Kerry Buchecker; Shane Wall
Subject: Varlie Fifs

Dear Kerry and Shane,

Just to thank you both for setting up the wonderful encounter with a beautiful 80 year old this morning. It was the last of my *Towards Healing* encounters (19 days to go) ... and it was by far the best. What a remarkable woman. She actually shed a tear out of sadness for [REDACTED], as a man who was no doubt in search of effaction and never found it. Phew! Well done to all concerned as much was achieved. I do hope Harry Dyer is also able to see the beauty and strength of Varlie.

Warmest regards and thanks,

Frank

--
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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
23rd April, 2012.

Dear Dr. Dyer,

On the 12th December last year, I met with you concerning the sexual assault of my son Jon, by [REDACTED] while a pupil of Maynooth College in 1971.

At that meeting, I was of the impression you would confront [REDACTED] with this revelation given to me by Jon, just six days before he died on [REDACTED] last year.

To date, I have not had any word from you this has taken place, and with the publicity at the moment, I am having great difficulties

I am hoping you have found the courage to do what I have asked of you.



Oblates of Mary Immaculate (Australia)

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May 10, 2012

Mrs Varlie Fifis
[REDACTED]

Dear Varlie

I respond to your letter dated April 23, 2012.

I have just returned from spending time with the Oblates in their various missions in Hong Kong and so the partial delay in responding to your letter.

Varlie, I am able to inform you that I have carried out your wishes and had a meeting with Fr [REDACTED]

I was unaware that it was also your will that I should inform you when this meeting had taken place. I apologize for that.

Yours Sincerely
[REDACTED]

Fr Harry Dyer
Provincial
[REDACTED]