

Witness Name: James Edward Joseph Tasker

Statement No: WITN0675001

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Dated: 05/07/2021

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF JAMES EDWARD JOSEPH TASKER

I, James Edward Joseph Tasker state: –

INTRODUCTION

1. My full name is James Edward Joseph Tasker and I was born on **GRO-C** 1968. I currently live in Palmerston North with my partner and work in the gardening industry.
2. I was born in Ōtaki and grew up with my parents and older sister.
3. My ethnicity is European from my mother's side and part-Māori from my Dad's side of the family; he was from around Ruatoria. I haven't yet explored that much of my whakapapa, partly because of my total dyslexia.
4. This statement relates to the time I spent at Marylands School in Christchurch and outlines the abuse I suffered at the hands of the Catholic order of St John of God. I will outline the abuse and how this has affected my life since.

Background

5. My parents were **GRO-B** and **GRO-B** and I have an older sister **GRO-B**, who is four years older than me. Growing up we had a happy family life, I loved both my parents and I have good memories growing up as a kid. We were a normal family, with good and bad aspects.

6. Both my grandparents and my mother were strong Catholics, but it was really my grandparents that shoved the religion down my throat. I was made to go to church two or three days a week. I just kept making a scene and stirring people up as I didn't want to go, so eventually they stopped taking me. We went to church in Levin where they lived, I think it was the St Joseph's parish. I really took no notice of church growing up, I didn't have holy communion and was happy when I got kicked out.
7. As my father was a bricklayer, our family moved around a lot with his work and we ended up living in New Plymouth when it was time for me to attend school.

Schooling

8. I started primary school in New Plymouth at a Catholic school run by Nuns. At school I would stir up everyone, start riots in the classroom and throw chalk around. I know I drove my mother nuts. I was kicked out of this school and because of this and the fact my parents then split up, my mother, sister and I moved back to Foxton. My grandmother bought us a rundown house.
9. Once back in Foxton I first went to Coley Street school. Unfortunately, at Coley Street I was suspended quite quickly. There was a terrible teacher there called Mrs [GRO-B] who would slap you across the knuckles with her metal ruler if you wrote the letters wrong in your writing book. I warned her if she did it again, I would rip her wig off. She did hit my knuckles again, so I ripped off her wig and threw it around the room like a rugby ball. I returned to Coley a few weeks later but again got in trouble so needed to move to Park Street school, also in Foxton.
10. My mother had me assessed by our doctor as I was extremely hyperactive. I had been from birth and have been for all of my life. My mother then took me to a shrink called Dr Buchanan. I was diagnosed around this time as hyperactive and having ADHD. The doctor also prescribed me Ritalin, but my mother took me off it as it turned me into a zombie. It made me just sit on the floor rocking back and forth. My ADHD has prevented me from sleeping much at night, even to this day I only sleep a couple of hours a night.

11. During my early schooling I also went and lived in Canberra, Australia, for a short period as my father was working on Parliament House. I enjoyed this but returned to Foxtton a short time later.
12. It wasn't long before I was also kicked out of Park Street school and as a result, I was sent to Napier to attend a boarding school named Beck House. Beck House was run by the government and accommodated boys who were out of control. I have good memories from Beck House. There was a lot of outdoor activities and because I was always busy, I loved it. It was exactly what was needed for someone like me.
13. It was not until I turned 12 that I returned to my family home in Foxtton. I had to leave Beck House because of my age.
14. Once back in Foxtton, I started high school at Horowhenua College in Levin. At high school I was in a special class called WE. This class was a class for kids with special needs and included kids who were intellectually handicapped. I hated this school. I was only there for around two months before I was expelled after some seventh formers took my lunch money. I was big and tall for my age, over six foot when I was only 12 years old. When the pupils stole my lunch money, I belted them with a solid piece of wood. This led to me getting expelled.
15. I believe I could have got a good education if I just had the right teachers. Some teachers I had were brilliant, ones that understood me and who taught me practical stuff and kept me busy. I now only have a memory of one good teacher who understood me and who taught me to read a newspaper. I couldn't sit still in some classes and just clashed with most of them. As a result, I can now not read or write.
16. Another place I visited, just once, was a boys' home in Whanganui they called "Colditz Castle". It was a terrible place, but luckily the psychiatrist told Mum that it was not a place for me. I witnessed a patient getting hosed down in the dungeons and it freaked me out. I believe the psychiatrist then advised my mother to send me to a Catholic school called Marylands which was in Christchurch. I had run out of options for schools in Horowhenua.

Marylands

17. My mother and I flew down to Christchurch for her to deliver me to the school.
18. I was admitted into Marylands special school on the 10 September 1982 aged 14. Marylands was situated in the suburb of Halswell
19. I remember arriving and seeing a physically handicapped kid in nappies coming outside and dribbling. I had immediate concerns and wondered where I was being put. My mother told me it was end of the line for me and I had to stay there.
20. I thought it was a pleasant looking place when I arrived, with nice gardens and things, but from the first night I watched the Brothers in their white collars walking around the bedrooms and quickly got concerned.
21. The accommodation at Marylands was made up of a number of villas. I was placed in Villa number 2 of five although a sixth villa was also opened at a later date during my stay.
22. Our bedrooms were like little dog boxes and that is how I felt. There were around 10 boys per villa and each villa had a central shower/toilet block and kitchen area. We all ate together in the villas.
23. Each villa also had a Brother assigned with his own room, which was near the shower/toilet block. From their rooms they could easily see the boys entering, using or leaving these facilities. There were also some ladies that would help us get ready for bed at night.
24. I recall St Joseph's Orphanage, which was right next door to Marylands. I did not have anything to do with the orphanage and I did not see the Nuns come over. I do recall there being a tunnel that ran from the church to where the Nuns lived.
25. I can still picture the faces of the Brothers but only remember one name, that of **GRO-B Br DQ** this is because he was in charge of our villa.

26. There was quite a sexual culture among the Brothers. I was aware from their actions that three Brothers were banging each other – I could tell from the way they touched each other, touching the other's buttocks.
27. Every Sunday, the Brothers used to get plastered from the wine. I could smell the alcohol on them. On Sunday there would be an early Mass, from then on, they would drink. The 5pm Mass got cancelled because they were too pissed.
28. We used to attend the church which was on site and were expected to attend Mass on a daily basis. I was asked to be an altar boy but hated it and refused to behave. I would drink the wine and even burnt a Bible, so was eventually allowed not to attend. I remember cutting the ropes to the bells to stop the noise at 5.30 in the morning.
29. I didn't cooperate in other ways. When the name changed to Hogben School, I burnt the new labels on the vans. When the Brothers tried to get me to take part in disabled sports, I tore up my sports strip.
30. Once I got older, I would just leave Marylands in the weekends and not attend church. I would go to places like Diamond Harbour and the Cashmere Hills. When my grandmother died, they had trouble finding me to tell me as I was having a nice little holiday in Akaroa.
31. As well as the Brothers, there were lay teachers employed for the schooling side of things and we were taught in classes well away from the villas.
32. I remember my first teacher as being Mr Butcher and our class was made up of all sorts of different kinds of kids with different abilities. I can't recall many of the boys' names very well. I didn't make a lot of friends. We were too different.
33. Workwise, we did chores at Marylands. I worked in the laundry and kitchen. I had no problems doing this as I liked being busy because of my ADHD. I couldn't stand watching TV. As I got older, I actually started making cane furniture and selling it to the Brothers and lay staff.

34. The staff attempted to give me Ritalin, but I would flush the tablets down the toilet because I did not want to be out of it and smashed off my trolley. They thought I was taking my pills.
35. Most of the staff were cool and nice to us boys. The ladies would help us at night and some would take us out in the weekends and we'd go on motorbikes and do other cool stuff. I remember there were four young staff, two of whom would sit down with me and help me read. I never had a problem with any of the lay staff.
36. I remember my sister visited me once at Marylands, but I always used to go back home during the holidays, so visits didn't matter to me, but I felt bad for the boys who never went home. I used to tell my Mum about the abuse when I went home for the holidays. She'd say, "If you stuff this up, you're bugged."
37. Two of my friends at Marylands, they never saw their parents, they were dropped off and for years had had no family support, just the Brothers.

ABUSE

38. Right from the beginning of my time at Marylands I was aware that there was a huge amount of sexual behaviour happening between the Brothers and the boys and also between the older and younger boys.
39. At night I would hear noises coming from the other boys' bedrooms, noises of moaning and groaning which scared me. I had a baseball bat under my bed to ensure nobody came near me.
40. One incident I witnessed was down the back of the rugby field. There were two older boys one of whom was **GRO-B-2** as well as two little five-year-old boys. They were in the underground hut and I witnessed that one of the little boys had his pants off and his legs apart and **GRO-B-2** was standing over him with his pants off, about to have anal intercourse.
41. The other older boy appeared to be having oral sex with the other five-year-old. All four boys were in school uniform. When the older boys saw me approaching, they pulled up their pants and chased me across the rugby field. When they caught me, I was punched and kicked but I never told anybody about what had

happened. **GRO-B-2** had been brought up at Marylands from a very young age. He was one of the sick ones. He was a weirdo who was stuffed in the head. He was dangerous and weird. I had to smash him in the head once in the toilet block because he tried to feel me up. I just kept away from him.

42. With the Brothers, it was like they would go through each villa at night and it was like an open market for their sexual behaviour.
43. I once witnessed a Brother fondling a young boy's genitals in the shower block.
44. I was at Marylands for about eight months before I was approached in a sexual way. By this time **GRO-B Br DQ** was in charge of our villa. One night I was lying in bed when **GRO-B Br DQ** who was new at the school came in to tuck me in.
45. **GRO-B Br DQ** tucked me in and then put his hand under the blankets and touched my penis. He continued playing with me until I told him to get out of my room.
46. The next morning, I approached him, and he took me into his room which was down the end of the villa. **GRO-B Br DQ** told me he was sorry about what had happened and would not do it again.
47. Unfortunately **GRO-B Br DQ** lied and did exactly the same thing to me about four months later. To me it was the way that the Brothers operated. They would appear to be tucking in the boys at night but instead touched them and abused them. I just threatened him that if he did it again, I would smash him with my bat which I had under my bed.
48. I think he got the message as he left me alone but just continued visiting other boys in other villas at night. **GRO-B Br DQ** would go through the whole villa tucking in all the boys and fondling them, it was disgusting.
49. Another Brother tried it on me one Sunday when I was playing basketball in the gym. The Brother sat down and talked to me and then began to abuse me. He fiddled with my penis and he wanted me to go out the back of the gym and have oral sex with him. He was short and looked like a penguin. When he tried it on, I attacked him and threw him across the room. I believe I hurt him because,

they phoned and told my mother. She told them that I don't react like that for no reason. I told my Mum that the Brothers were stuffed in the head.

50. There was one other occasion that another Brother tried to fondle my genitals in the shower block. As a result, I smashed him, and a number of other Brothers had to jump on me. The Brother I punched went to hospital and I was told to go to bed. I wasn't held to account because they knew if they called the cops, I would open up a hornet's nest. The Brother I punched was then shipped back to Australia.
51. Looking back, I should have had assault charges laid against me for what I did to these Brothers, but they didn't call the Police. They just swept the abuse under the carpet.
52. I believe now I probably changed things at Marylands when I was there and stopped some of the abuse from happening. Because I was so big and got violent with the Brothers they then left me alone, but also avoided other boys who were near me or in my villa. I threatened any Brother coming in to our villa at night and even punched one in the nose once who came in at night. There were five-year-olds at Marylands and they were just targeted by the Brothers.
53. There were some good Brothers and I remember four who were really nice. I felt they tried to help me and were supportive. Unfortunately, they all left.
54. I was also sexually abused by another pupil called GRO-B-3. He was a friend of mine at the school but abused me several times. GRO-B-3 had been at the school since he was very small and had his own flat GRO-B. He was probably three years older than me.
55. The first time the abuse happened was when I was about 14 and went out on the weekend with GRO-B-3 to his mate's flat. We consumed alcohol and I got drunk. I then went to sleep at the back of the house, and GRO-B-3 got into bed with me and started playing with my penis. He then sucked on my penis. I had known GRO-B-3 right from day one at Marylands and did not know he was like that.
56. On another occasion I got drunk on a flask of vodka up in GRO-B-3's flat. He then tried to put his hands down my pants and suck on my penis, but I told him to

"fuck off". I remember one of the kitchen staff coming up to drag me out of the room because I could hardly walk.

57. GRO-B-3 tried to fondle me on many other occasions, but I never let anything happen again. GRO-B-3 actually came to visit me once in Foxton. He was still very weird, and my mother and I had to put him on the bus to send him away.
58. There was no other abuse on me other than what I have just described. I did however witness other boys fiddling with each other and sucking on each other's penises. It happened on a day-to-day basis.
59. There was a lot of sex amongst the boys, a sexual culture. There were lots of sexual noises at night, when walking around. I was aware of it happening in the toilet blocks and boys jumping into bed together at nights. I found it disgusting but I just switched off to this mostly, otherwise I would go nuts.
60. I remember one boy who would masturbate in class in front of everyone, he did not know it was wrong. I had to hit him across the head to stop.
61. I just made it clear that no one was to go near me.
62. Boys would take each other into the boiler room and also into the gym where no one could see them.

Physical

63. I would get the cane on an almost daily basis for my behaviour, which after a while stopped having any effect on me. In fact, I actually attacked two Brothers with their own cane after threatening to do it if they hit me. As a result, they rang my mother and told her what I had done. They threatened to call the Police and I just said, "please do", thinking that would close down the school. Of course, they never rang the Police.
64. They also used to soak their canes in water and then leave them in the sun to make them more effective, more painful.

Later years at Marylands

65. Once I got a bit older, I shifted into the villa for older boys, it was like a flattering situation. We were all around the same age and we were on our own instead of a Brother sleeping in our dorm. It was to get us ready for when we left Marylands. By this time, I realised I couldn't stop the abuse that was

happening at Marylands, so I left the rest of the boys alone. All the boys in my villa were big boys, so we were left alone by the Brothers.

66. I felt sorry for some of the boys in this villa. Only six of them knew their own families. At holidays, the rest of them would be billeted out and wouldn't know who they were going to. One of my mates who did go home to his family, came back with horrible cigarette burns on his back. When his father turned up at the school, I whacked his father out cold with a stick. But again, nothing happened to me as they were too scared to deal with me. I was nearly 18 and a big kid.

67. Once in the villa for older boys I did have a lot more freedom at the weekends, which was a good aspect of Marylands for me. When I did my banking on Fridays, I didn't return. I earned money by making the cane furniture, but I also worked at a mate's place painting on the weekend. With the money, I bought an old dunger car and travelled all over the place.

68. I left Marylands when I turned 17 in 1985. This was because of my age. I never maintained any relationships with any of the boys and have only been back once.

Life after Marylands

69. Initially, I went back to live with Mum in Levin and I started my own landscaping business. But I had problems with my employees, so I had to close my business and then went up to Auckland.

70. Since then, I have had numerous jobs including sandblasting bridges and cleaning high-rise windows. I have worked in Australia welding and painting. Now that I am back in New Zealand, I am again gardening. I believe it is hard to make good money here, but I came back five years ago because my mother, who was in Otaki, was too sick. When I can, I'd like to go back to Australia, but that's not possible right now.

Disclosure

71. There were never any threats made towards me about not saying anything, it was just that everyone kept their mouths shut about what was going on. At one

stage I told my mother that the Brothers were abusing the other children. I didn't tell her that I had in fact been abused. She told me to watch my back and keep my nose clean. I told her what was going on when I returned home for the school holidays. I told her more than once.

72. When I told my mother, she rang the school and complained to someone. "We'll sort it out," she was told. But it was swept under the carpet. I told her I was not bullshitting, and I think my mother believed me.
73. GRO-B Br DQ did once tell me not to tell anyone and said "It's our little secret." He was at the school up until the time I left.
74. While I was at Marylands I did complain to some of Brothers about what I had seen of the Brothers coming into the boys' rooms at night. Of course, nothing was ever done about it.
75. I also told a nice 20-year-old staff member who had only been there a couple of weeks. They just told me, "I need my job."
76. I also told my former partner GRO-B
-4, who is now GRO-B GRO-B-
4 and I were together for 10 years and I helped bring up her daughter, GRO-B, as well. I told GRO-B
-4 about the abuse when I was about 25 years old. She also went with me to the Police in 2003, which I describe below.

IMPACT OF THE ABUSE

77. As a result of the abuse and my experience at Marylands it has made me a lot warier of people. I am quicker to not like people. It's made me look at lots of things differently.
78. I have no problem with relationships with both females and male friends, but I have a problem with "weirdos" and any paedophile as I now know children don't have a choice and adults do.
79. Without doubt I am a lot more violent as result of my experience at Marylands. If I don't like someone it's best, they do not come near me. Over the years I

have had quite a few fights because of harassment situations. I am also triggered if I see abuse and will instantly get violent to protect any victim.

80. I am often wary around other people's kids and will be standoffish unless I know them well.

81. My anger and violence have led to many interactions with the Police and resulted in a criminal record. Lately, though, I have kept out of trouble because I do not socialise much as I do not really like Palmerston North.

82. I still need to be kept busy due to my ADHD. To do this, I keep busy at work and I do lots of walking after work. By keeping busy, I know how to look after myself so I don't need to use medication. I refuse to take Ritalin. I believe parents of kids with ADHD need to make sure their kids get out more instead of using drugs.

Using alcohol to shut out abuse

83. I have always been a heavy drinker. From the age of 15, when I got my driver's licence, I was drinking. At Marylands I had money and my own bank account. During the week I would be in class and have vodka to drink. Then come Friday, I would be out of school and off to parties after getting alcohol.

84. My heavy drinking started at school because it shut me off from what was going on. It helped me take no notice of what was going on with the Brothers. It shut it out, relaxed me, calmed me. Without it I was always fired up, I never let my back down. Even now, I'm always watching.

85. In New Zealand, before I went to Australia, I was prescribed medication for blood pressure, and Ritalin. When I moved to Australia, my Indian doctor there informed me that I should not be on that combination of medications, and that the blood pressure medication was no longer even prescribed in Australia. I had been having dizzy spells and nose bleeds. I stopped all the medications and had no problems with my blood pressure until I was back in New Zealand again. I currently take no medication for my ADHD and take blood pressure pills only when I need to.

Nightmares and flashbacks and insomnia

86. I still get nightmares and have done for many years. I used to have them all the time. If I'm not busy, I will wake up screaming and have done ever since I left school.

87. Most the time I can block stuff out. I have now told my boss who is aware of the abuse and nightmares. He also knows I want to get even. The majority of my flashbacks are of what happened at Marylands. I mostly didn't sleep to make sure I was not assaulted by Brothers and boys.

REDRESS

88. In 2003 the Police rang and initially spoke to GRO-B
-4 as they could not get hold of me. I then went to the station and spoke with Detective Ross at Palmerston North. I made a statement, looked at photographs and identified people and places.

Refer Exhibit WITN0675002 – Marylands Newsletter

Refer Exhibit WITN0675003 – Copy of Police statement from 2003

89. After making the statement, I was told that I would be required as a witness and was required to go to Christchurch in about two weeks for court. I was told my flights would be paid for. After I left the station, I didn't hear from them or receive any calls.

90. I told my boss and got leave from work, but nothing happened, and we never heard back from them. I followed up by enquiring at the old Palmerston North police station, I rang the Police several times and I was told that it wasn't happening. I was really pissed off that I was not required because I wanted to get even and thought something needed to be done about them.

91. I was also angry with the Police and I went in a couple of times to the police station. I told them they were wankers and was rude to them. I told them that they were bullshitters after getting me to open up to my partner about the abuse and then promising a court case but not delivering.

92. At least they could have rung and told me I was not needed as I had arranged with my boss at the quarry to have time off work for two weeks. He had to get in other employees to cover me, so I missed out on two weeks' pay.

93. I have never complained to the Catholic Church themselves and no one else has ever contacted me except for the Royal Commission.
94. I have been told there is a church process, but I am reluctant due to their history of sweeping things under the carpet.
95. I have never approached ACC other than for physical injuries while working. I have also never had any counselling of any kind.

LOOKING FORWARD

96. To me, the purpose of any future complaints or changes would be for me to get some satisfaction. I am aware that it would take time, which again I do not agree with as the abuse has for too long been swept under the carpet.
97. Any of the Brothers who abused deserves to be locked up. That way they can't go to any other school. During my time at Marylands their punishment was to be shipped back to Australia. This did not fix the problem; it just makes it worse by moving them around and hiding them.
98. For me personally, yes, there should be compensation, because it's stuffed up people's lives. It did not completely stuff up my life because I didn't let it go as far as it did for others. When I left Marylands, I knew some of those boys' lives would be ruined for ever. I knew others would end up on the dole, the sickness benefit or would be left locked up in halfway houses.
99. I've burnt all my school photos. I burnt them at the time I received them, for both the college in Levin and Marylands. I didn't want to show anyone the classes I'd been in – I was totally embarrassed. I did not want any memory of this time.
100. I would like to see something done, in all areas of what has happened at Marylands. I would have liked to go to court but admit it would have been hard to control my anger.
101. The reality is that my aggressive behaviour and ADHD helped protect me. Unfortunately, most of the other kids were half "mental", and who is going to listen to them? Cops would not take complaints from people who are half nuts.

102. Marylands was the only school that would have me, and apart from the abuse, I had a ball. But I would like the Brothers to pay for their abuse, if any of the bastards are still alive.

Statement of Truth

This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and was made by me knowing that it may be used as evidence by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

Signed  **GRO-C**

Dated: 

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