

Radio 2GB: Ray Hadley – Interview with mother of now deceased student 27 February 2009

Yesterday I spoke to the New South Wales Ombudsman, Bruce Barber, about a 2004 report into allegations of inappropriate relationships at Knox Prep School in Sydney. Three men as you know are facing charges. That file was closed in 2004 with the investigator finding there was nothing to report to police at the time. As you know there have now been three teachers from that school, Knox, charged with alleged child sex offences. 59-year old former teacher, Adrian John Nisbett has been charged with four indecent assault offences after three alleged victims came forward. 71-year old Barry Tiffan Stewart, former music teacher and tennis coach at the school has been charged with four offences from the mid-1980's. And the first man charged, a Year-6 teacher who was still teaching there, Craig Treloar, he's charged with two acts of indecency and two counts of indecent assault.

Yesterday, the police investigating this told me that so far eight or nine alleged victims have come forward and they're talking to other people.

After our discussions yesterday and the school announced that it had done its best to contact the New South Wales Ombudsman, Mr Barber back in 2004 to report these allegations of inappropriate relationships.

Well since then I've been contacted by a mother of a former student from Knox Grammar and she's also the mother of an alleged victim of sexual abuse at the school. Unfortunately her son has since passed on. But she says the school, Knox Grammar was made aware of the nature of these allegations more than 30 years ago. Now it's very important here that I protect her identity, her family's identity and until the court proceedings continue, the identity of the people who allegedly offended against her now deceased son, for the sake of today's proceedings I'm calling the lady 'Joan'. And Joan's on the line right now.

RH Hello, Joan.

J Good morning, Ray.

RH Firstly, I want to thank you for being so brave in electing to talk to me.

J Well you have a lovely program.

RH And I want to offer my condolences on behalf of everyone here on the loss of your son.

J Thank you.

RH When did your son attend Knox Grammar?

J From 19 ... wait a minute, '76 we approached ... my husband approached the headmaster and complained about our son being so disturbed, emotionally disturbed in a very bad way.

RH Okay. So '76 .. we're talking about a long time ago.

J Yes.

- RH When you approached the then headmaster who's moved on, did you discuss, apart from your son being disturbed, the reason you thought that he was disturbed at that time?
- J Yes.
- RH And what did you tell the then headmaster, Joan?
- J My husband told the headmaster he thought he might have been, you know, interfered with sexually. And the headmaster said that it was all in my husband's imagination and that our son was a rather dramatic child.
- RH Was a rather dra..... how old was your son at the time?
- J He was 10.
- RH So you went to the then principal in 1976, via your husband. Your husband was told that there would be nothing in suggestions that someone may have been interfering with your son.
- J No.
- RH ... for want of a better term?
- J No, interfering is the word, yes.
- RH Is that the only time that your husband went to speak to this fellow?
- J Well he then wrote him a letter, this headmaster, wrote my husband a letter to tell him that again, he was repeating it was all in his imagination. He stood by all his staff.
- RH In a very general sense, you've heard the names I've mentioned on this program and we can't be specific and I know you know why, Joan?
- J Of course.
- RH Adrian John Nisbett and Barry Tiffan Stewart, were they teachers at the school in 1976 when your son attended there?
- J Yes.
- RH And Mr Treloar who I think is a bit younger, he wasn't there, I suspect at that time?
- J Only as a pupil.
- RH He was a pupil at the school?
- J Yes.
- RH Umm. I wasn't aware of that.

- J But nothing to do with the situation ...
- RH No obviously, and I can't cast any aspersions on Mr Nisbett or Mr Stewart. But they were teachers at the school in 1976
- J Exactly, yes.
- RH Now your son passed away, how long ago did he pass ago?
- J 13 years ago.
- RH 13 years ago. At what age was he then?
- J 34.
- RH That's very young.
- J Yes.
- RH Very, very young. Did your son after leaving Knox have a troubled life?
- J In a way, yes, until he got himself settled, yes.
- RH At what age did he sort of get his life back in order so to speak?
- J Oh, I'd say about 28.
- RH At 28.
- J 26, 28.
- RH And the alleged incident that your husband spoke to the then principal about had happened when he was just 10. 18 years before?
- J 10 or 11.
- RH Okay.
- J Between 10 and 11.
- RH So Joan, in a general sense, when you started to hear over the past month about what had happened
- J Yes
- RH And charges being levelled and all of a sudden on my program yesterday the investigating officer telling me that there were many students coming forward, former students, I should note. Coming forward, it wouldn't have come as a great shock to you given what you knew or you thought had happened back in 1976?
- J No, not at all.

- RH Have you had any opportunity to talk to police about this incident in '76 relating to your deceased son?
- J Yes.
- RH Do you have any documentation at all that you can provide to them or is it just from your memory from '76?
- J It's from our memory.
- RH And I guess it's a pretty horrific memory?
- J Well we have gone to the police and they've taken our statement.
- RH You're very brave to come on the program and talk to me about this and we'll protect your identity and it's a terribly tragic situation but perhaps you shouldn't feel alone, it sounds like many, many mums and dads are dealing with what you're having to deal with today.
- J Thank you but it was mainly concerned with a cover up. Being covered up.
- RH Because yesterday the now principal who wasn't the principal in '76 said that they'd made the best attempts to fix this all up but you're saying as early as 1976, 33-years ago, something was going on at that school.
- J Oh, definitely.
- RH And it's been covered up?
- J Yes.
- RH For three decades.
- J Yes.
- RH I really appreciate your time, Joan.
- J Thank you.
- RH And I'm sorry to trouble you, thank you very much.
- JU Thank you.

That's the mother of a now deceased former student of Knox Grammar. There is more to the story than I can share with you here and you'll understand the reasons, there are three men facing very serious allegations.

But today Knox Grammar can their principal who was very quickly on the front foot two days ago, in the last 48-hours and tell us, oh yes in 2004 we did our very best to make sure allegations of inappropriate relationships at Knox Grammar were investigated not by the police but by the New South Wales Ombudsman, Bruce Barber, a decent man and a thorough man and he couldn't sustain the

allegations that are being made because the principal person who originally made the allegations was not prepared to go to the next step at that stage.

But what Knox Prep School needs to do today, in very clear terms, is announce why in 1976 when Joan's husband approached the then principal about the possibility that their 10-year old son was being sexually abused by a teacher, that they told the father that it was a figment of his and his son's imagination. I've had a gutful of institutions like this one hiding. It's a school that enjoys a very good reputation, a very good reputation. But for three decades they've hidden this from the general public and today they need to explain why.