

**Testimony of Raymond Upton
In Support of Senate Bill 99
For The
Judiciary Vermont House Committee**

April 23, 2021

Thank you to all the house representatives for taking testimony on senate bill 99. I was at Kurn Hattin for four years from the fall of 1961 to the summer of 1965. I was sent to Kurn Hattin because I had what is now known as extreme dyslexia that is a learning and communications disability. Much later in my life I learn that as part of my extreme dyslexia I was also developmentally disabled. By the second year I was also at Kurn Hattin because of a broken home, I was 11 to 15 years old while I was at the school, and I am now 71 years old.

Today there is no recourse for the physical assault and abuse that so many people suffered when they were children like myself and unable to help themselves. Many people never tell anyone about their abuse – ever. But some finally come to terms with it and process it as I have been doing during the past few months.

To find that there is nothing they or I can do about the physical abuse because of an arbitrary statute of limitations is extremely devastating and only serves to re-traumatize the survivors like myself and protect the abusers and the institutional enablers. But now because of senate bill 99 there is an opportunity to help those children like I was and to avoid perpetration in the future. With perpetrators and institutions knowing there is an option for civil liability for harming children they will treat children a lot better.

I have been aware for many years that Kurn Hattin has affected my life in bad ways. I have always just shrugged it off and said to myself, well I am strong, I am manly, and I will handle it. I just moved on with my life and focused on my work and business. Up to this point I have been doing just that, but maybe I have not done as well as I thought all these years.

Maybe this pandemic has allowed others to also address the horrors of their abusive childhood past. And for those who have not or cannot maybe I can help in some way to be their voice here today.

When I was at Kurn Hattin around the spring of 1964 I clearly remember someone saying to me if you stay here more than three years it will have a very dramatic and very negative effect on your entire life. Institutional living in your formative years will be very bad for you.

All through my life and to this very day I have had many flashbacks of that moment and that statement. I remember right where I was standing at Kurn Hattin when it was said to me.

As I have grown older and learned more about life I would say a lot of what I personally experienced while living at Kurn Hattin would be unacceptable today. But maybe it was even unacceptable then. There was no rule book or a guide book when I was at Kurn Hattin they just told me what to do and what not to do. But they did not tell me everything.

I can only include in this testimony a small portion of the experiences that adversely affected me tremendously while I was at Kurn Hattin. The worst of it I cannot describe or express in this forum.

In an attempt to heal myself I have written a very detailed description of all the physical, psychological and sexual abuse and activities I experienced and witnessed while I was at Kurn Hattin. Including a very detailed description of how my child abuse has severely affected my entire life.

Simply put and in summary throughout the four years that I was at Kurn Hattin I personally experienced with other boys, men and women the following.

- Violently forced oral sex
- With my hands tied I was a forced naked punching bag
- Multiple very hard face slappings while naked on my knees
- With my hands tied very hard naked spankings
- That was all done for the entertainment of adults not for discipline
- Naked whippings while tied to trees
- Forced exhibition showers
- Forced naked gym wrestling
- Other naked gym activities
- And invasive medical examinations

After some of the abuse I was threatened with extreme beatings and being sent to boy prison if I told anyone.

Because of my extreme dyslexia combined with being developmentally disabled the physical, psychological, and sexual abuse that I was subjected to - created a far more devastating effect on my entire life.

I also personally observed other boys being physically and emotionally abused. I was also continually told of naked physical abuse of other boys.

There was also unjustified discipline when I was at Kurn Hattin. Boys had to stand or sit in the corner for hours if they did even the littlest thing wrong. There were boys standing and sitting in the corners a lot with no food or water. Sometimes the same boy had to do it for several hours three or four days in a row. They also made boys stand with their arms stretched out left and right holding books. Then when the books became too heavy the boys had to stand there with just their arms stretched out for another half hour.

The house parents would also keep changing the rules so boys never knew what was right or what was wrong. They would tell boys one thing then say I never told you that, so now a boy had to sit or stand in the corner again even more times.

Later in life I learned that in prisons to control the inmates the guards intentionally change the rules even daily. They say things like I told you to do that, even when they have not said that. So it turns out that it is used as a control method in prisons. But Kurn Hattin was not a boy's prison, the boys were orphans they came from broken homes or just had learning disabilities like myself.

When I was at Kurn Hattin (for the time that I was there) most if not all of us were pretty good kids and for the most part we all got along kind of well. The out of control discipline by some of the Kurn Hattin house parents just never made any sense. I could go on with more detailed horrific abuse that I and others went through but it's more than likely not appropriate in this setting.

My 4 years of abuse at Kurn Hattin has come rushing back into my life all over again like a tidal wave in just the last few months after reading the Kurn Hattin statement on the Kurn Hattin website just this last October, and then reading about all the Kurn Hattin child abuse on-line.

I have been reliving my abuse every waking and sleeping moment right to this day. It just does not stop - it won't go away. It has been like I am being revictimized all over again, four years of abuse all rolled into the last few months.

All of us survivors need a structure to be able to process the road to get accountability. A process that will deter future child abusers and institutions that currently let them run free and wreak havoc on children's lives and on children's futures. In my mind it is inconceivable that people like my-self so severely physically abused have no access to justice. But I am very encouraged by this Senate Bill 99 that will provide sexual and physical abuse survivors the same rights.

Authoritative research as shown, that most children never experience abuse and never even know that abuse is going on around them. The remaining like my-self can be subjected to varying degrees of abuse from mild to very extreme. Of those of us that have been abused while we were children many will never speak about it.

And then there are those who committed suicide because they could not cope with the trauma that was inflicted on them. And yet others died because of over-doses as a result of self-medicating to deal with the pain.

If it weren't for this current virus pandemic that we are all dealing with right now my voice more than likely would have never been heard. To escape my child abuse at Kurn Hattin like many men I became an extreme 24/7 workaholic. My whole life has been about running forward and never looking back. Throughout my life many people have ask me, Ray - what are you running form.

So when I stumbled into the Kurn Hattin website statement I was shocked and I was heartbroken. I found out that Kurn Hattin had become like all the Catholic Orphanages and Boarding Schools. I always thought that I was the only one that had dark secrets of physical and sexual abuse at Kurn Hattin. It turns out that I am only one of many-many others in the state of Vermont.

So I testify here today as a voice for the past - there are a lot of us out there. A voice for the present, today there are kids living at home right now, in foster care right now, and on campuses all over Vermont what happens to them, when someone says - the time has run out. And a voice for the future children what happens to them, when someone says, sorry - the time has run out.

After child abuse, the time never runs out on the pain. The time never runs out on the damage. And the time never runs out on the suffering for an entire life-time.

Passing Senate Bill 99 will allow survivors of physical and physiological child abuse to take a negative experience and turn it into a positive, for the future of children at Kurn Hattin and throughout Vermont.

So I urge you, with all my passion, please pass Senate Bill 99.

For letting me speak here today,
Thank you