

TESTIMONY OF CAROLINE BASHAW IN SUPPORT OF S. 99

April 1, 2021

My name is Caroline Blake Bashaw. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 99, that will eliminate the statute of limitations for child physical abuse. Children need to be protected from abuse and passing this bill will help stop child abuse, because people and institutions won't be able to get away with it any more. The abuse I suffered was horrible and affects me to this day, at nearly 80 years old.

On the first day of my arrival to Kurn Hattin, Mrs. Ford said, "not another Blake kid!" and "oh you're Caroline Blake...I want you to find the brush and dustpan and sweep the stairs." At that point another little girl came down the stairs, and I asked her where I could find them because I didn't know where anything was kept. Mrs. Ford came back in and slapped me so hard across the face that I saw stars. She yelled "I TOLD YOU TO FIND THEM!" I was shocked and started to scream at which point the 250 pound cook, Mrs. Ward, came out and taped my mouth shut with adhesive duct tape. I was crying so much that I couldn't breathe and I was terrified. My face burning where I had slapped and when the cook finally ripped off the adhesive tape, it hurt so much. That was my first few moments at Kurn Hattin, it was a preview of the abuse that was to come over the next several years.

One day I was scared when a houseparent yelled to go outside so I ran out without shoes. It was raining and I was on the swing, I fell off and slammed down on my collarbone. I complained about the pain and Mrs. Ward just put me in a hot bathtub for two hours. Finally after days of pain and agony, they took me to the doctor's and I had a broken collar bone and had to be put in a sling.

The neglect continued. I had earaches and infections from the swimming pool. One night I was up screaming in pain. I wasn't given any medication or taken to the doctors after complaining for days. I was told to just go to bed and they left my infections untreated. They only took me to the doctor when they saw pus dripping from my ears. My eardrums burst from being neglected due to those ear infections. As an adult in the 1950's I saw an ENT and they asked why I had so much scar tissue in my ears, it was because I was neglected and physically abused by Kurn Hattin staff.

I used to get nose bleeds, and I recall it happening at Kurn Hattin. Mrs. Ford, the same foreman woman that slapped me the very first day I arrived, forced me to put my head on the floor and lay upside down. This caused me to choke on my blood and be unable to breath. Despite being in clear distress, she would not let me up and I choked and choked and coughed out the blood.

As punishment, I would have to climb up a ladder and scrub the kitchen with Oxalate for 8 hours at a time with no breaks, no food and nothing to drink. The water and this cleaner burned my hands. Mrs. Ward and my teacher, Mrs. Ruth Davis, were the ones responsible for this punishment. During another punishment, we were forced to sand and shellac the huge gymnasium floor, which caused significant physical pain and exhaustion and smelled horrible.

On other nights if I was caught talking, as punishment Mrs. Ward would make me stand up for 8 hours throughout the night, called standing: “on the line.” It would exhaust me, my body ached and would fall over.

There was not a shortage of abusive physical child labor. I was forced to do heavy loads of soaking wet laundry with extremely hot water that burned my hands.

There was a boy named Max Lincoln who was in my class. His legs got chopped up in a corn chipper when he was forced to operate it unsupervised. They found his foot and shoe in the barn. Luckily he survived but he was left deformed.

Staff was also emotionally abusive, telling me that our “mother was no good” and me and my siblings were worthless.

In 6th grade I started having panic attacks, I could not cope with being there. To this day, I still can't be in crowds.

My siblings and friends did not fare any better.

One of my brother's slammed into a brick building and suffered brain damage. The school tried to cover it up. He was impaired cognitively for the rest of his life and was never the same.

My brother, who *was* named Raymond, disclosed to me that he was also abused and molested. He was taken by staff on camping trips or to motel rooms. Sometimes two boys were taken at a time. My brother wrote a book while at Kurn Hattin called “No Ma, No Pa,” chronicling his suffering and Kurn Hattin took his book and shred it. He also recorded statements about the abuse on cassette tapes.

One girl that wet her bed had her head tied to a board by Mrs. Ford and had to sleep that way all night.

A girl named Joyce ran away to a nearby cabin. When they found her she was having a nervous breakdown. I was being punished and had to stay in the guest house. Instead of getting her help to cope with her breakdown, they put her in a bedroom room with me. She was going crazy and was extremely violent, punching holes in the wall. I was terrified.

When I went to meet with staff from Kurn Hattin later in life about the abuse, they told me that they shredded my and my families' records.

The abuse I suffered at Kurn Hattin has affected so many parts of my life. From relationships, to my career and emotional distress. After Kurn Hattin when I was a young adult, I entered boot camp for the Air Force. I passed with flying colors, as I was very intelligent. Yet, the past came creeping back and I started having flashbacks and re-living my trauma from Kurn Hattin. I had to be discharged because of the abuse I suffered.

Today, when I'm finally almost 80 years of age, I'm ready to seek justice. But the law currently says that the physical abuse that I suffered doesn't matter and there's nothing I can do about it and schools can get away with it. I ask you to please pass Senate Bill 99 and let people get

closure for the serious physical pain they have suffered. It must change so that children, who don't have a voice, eventually can have one when they are ready. Thank you again for your time.