

TESTIMONY OF RAYMOND UPTON IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 99

April 1, 2021

Thank you to the Senators 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.

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 that so many people suffered when they were children 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 going during the past few months.

To find, that there is nothing they 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.

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 children's harm, 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 and manly, I will handle it and just move on with my life and focus on my business and work.

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 the past, and for those who haven't or can't, maybe I can help in some way to be their voice.

When I was at Kurn Hattin around the spring of 1964 I clearly remember someone saying to me that if you stay here more than three years it will have a very dramatic and bad effect on your 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 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 when I was at Kurn Hattin, they just told me what to do and not to do. But they did not tell me everything.

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

In an attempt to heal, I have written a very detailed description of all the abuse and activities I experienced and witnessed, including a very detailed description of how the abuse has severely affected my entire life.

Simply put, and in summary during the four years I was at Kurn Hattin I basically personally experienced with other boys, men and women - forced oral sex, I was a forced naked punching bag with my hands tied, multiple very hard face slappings, naked spankings with my hands tied, naked whipping while tied to trees, forced exhibition showers, forced 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.

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

There was also unjustified discipline when I was at KH. Boys had to stand or sit in the corner for hours if they did the littlest thing wrong. There where boys standing and sitting in the corners a lot, with no chance to have food or drinks. 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 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. It is used as a control method.

But Kurn Hattin was not a boy prison. The boys were orphans, came from broken homes or just had learning disabilities like myself. When I was at Kurn Hattin most if not all of us were pretty good kids and for the most part, got along kind of well. The out of control discipline did not seem right.

I could go on with more detailed horrific abuse that I and others went through, but it's just too difficult and, more than likely, not appropriate in this setting.

My 4 years of abuse at KH has come rushing back over me like a tidal wave in just the last few months.

After reading the KH statement on the KH website this last October and then reading about all the KH 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. 4 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 abusers and institutions that currently let them run free and wreak havoc on children's lives.

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 can be subjected to varying degrees of abuse, from mild to extreme.

Of those of us that have been abused, many will never speak of it. And then there are those who committed suicide because they could not cope with the trauma inflicted on them, and yet others died to 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, my voice would have more than likely never been heard. To escape my abuse at Kurn Hattin I became an extreme 24/7 workaholic. My whole life has been about running forward and never looking back.

So when I stumbled into the Kurn Hattian website statement I was heartbroken and in shock. 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 one of many-many others in the state of Vermont.

So I testify today as a voice for the past, present and future children and I urge you to pass Senate Bill 99.

Doing so will allow survivors of abuse to take a negative experience and turn it into a positive for the future of children at Kurn Hattin and throughout Vermont.

Thank you so much.