

TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM GORSKY (FORMERLY DAVIDSON) REGARDING S. 99

April 1, 2021

I, William Gorsky (formerly Davidson), attended Kurn Hattin (“KH”) from 1983 to 1987. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today. I support and encourage Vermont legislators to pass Senate Bill 99 to ensure survivors of childhood abuse have a chance for justice and to hold abusers and the institutions that failed them accountable.

The physical abuse at Kurn Hattin that we had to endure was a cruel punishment. We at Kurn Hattin were not the A+ students. We were not the best-behaved kids. In fact, many of us were the throwaways; the screw-ups of society. Kurn Hattin was supposed to be a safe place for us to live, learn, and grow.

My following account of physical abuse at KH contains only four examples out of many examples of abuse that I endured.

The Broken Arm

In the 80’s while attending Kurn Hattin, while play fighting as the boys often did, staff member, Mark W. Davis told us to stop fighting. When myself and another student did not stop right away, he grabbed my arm and put me into an arm bar. I tried to get away from him. I called him a bad name and that’s when he snapped my arm towards my chest, and broke it like a twig. Davis tried to say I was fine and that if I told anyone, he would spread my body parts in the “Dead Man’s Swamp” behind one of the cottages at KH. I was very afraid and in a lot of pain. Not one staff member noticed or asked if I was ok. The fracture was confirmed 2 weeks later when I finally reported it to my parents, who took me for x-rays and a cast. When I reported the incident immediately after to the Deputy Director, Paul Quiney, he said he would take care of it. Davis remained employed at Kurn Hattin and no report was ever made to the authorities of the abuse. To this day, I have a permanent nodule on my arm because it was not treated for 2 weeks. Because of this medical neglect, it did not heal correctly. It’s a constant reminder of the abuse I endured at KH.

Peer Assault and Physical Abuse

Because of the lack of supervision, another boy entered the bathroom I was in and assaulted and beat me so bad I ended up in the infirmary. My stomach hurt so bad and I couldn’t go to the bathroom. They kept me there for 2 days before finally bringing me to the hospital, where I was found to be impacted. Despite me reporting this abuse immediately to Mr. Fisher, the student was never reprimanded or removed from Kurn Hattin. Mr. Fisher promised me he would take care of it but no report was ever made to authorities. To this day, I cannot use public bathrooms because the soap smells like the soap used in Kurn Hattin’s bathroom where I was beaten. It has caused me to lose multiple jobs.

The Egg Incident

My second week at Kurn Hattin, I was sitting at the main dining table eating eggs and bacon with my brothers. A boy who I will name John Doe did not like eggs and pushed them away. He was immediately sent to his room by a KH staff member named Mrs. Kelleher. Mr. Kelleher ran down the hall, and we saw her dragging John Doe by his hair down the hallway. She then force fed him the eggs while pinning his head on the table while the boy cried.

The Lunchroom

There are several accounts of physical abuse while doing lunch or supper duty at the cafeteria. One example is Mr. Searles grabbing a kid by the shirt and throwing him in the utility closet. We heard yelling and crying while they were in there. When they came out, the boy had red marks on his face. Obviously, he had been severely beaten.

Standing in the Corner

When a boy would get into trouble, oftentimes the punishment was standing in the corner. There were no bathroom breaks nor any food or water breaks. Hour after hour, we would have to stand in the corner of the room. I have seen boys collapse from exhaustion from this punishment. I have seen boys wet themselves from standing there too long. I only had to endure the corner punishment once myself for four hours for not cleaning the bathroom properly. I was lucky.

These are just a few examples of the type of child abuse I endured and observed on a daily basis. The abuse has had a lasting impact on my life and trying to cope with it today is very painful. The flashbacks are debilitating and have landed me in the emergency room. Passing Senate Bill 99 will deter abusers and the institutions that hire them and turn a blind eye to abuse, from doing so in the future. They need to know they cannot get away with it anymore. I don't want any other child to have to go through what we went through. I urge you to pass Senate Bill 99.