

WINEVVS

Royal commission: Abuse still haunts Queensland man four decades on

By Lexy Hamilton-Smith

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Kelvin Johnston waited 40 years for his day of reckoning.

It came in November this year when the school teacher who molested him while on a school camp, Wilfred Mentink, was thrown in jail.

Mr Johnston, who was just 14 when he was sexually abused, said the vile acts he had to endure still haunt him to this day.

His heart goes out to the thousands of child abuse victims hoping for justice today as the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse hands down its final report.

"We want action. Really people have to take the attitude [that] it all starts now," he said.

The damage caused

The former Salisbury High School student easily recalls the frightening school camp trip at Mount Barney in the Scenic Rim, when he and several of his fellow students fell victim to Mentink's predatory behaviour.

"The teacher proceeded to wander around all weekend naked," he said.

"Some of the things we witnessed was an abomination at the way kids should be treated by an adult.

Now 55, he would like to stare down his abuser and make him account for what he did.

"You have no idea the damage that is caused on a young mind," he would say.

"Your brain is rewired where you do not know what is going on and have to have years of therapy to get to the point where you can function.



PHOTO: Kelvin Johnston in the 1970s
(Supplied: Kelvin Johnston)

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PHOTO: Kelvin Johnston now.
(Supplied: Kelvin Johnston)



PHOTO: Convicted paedophile Wilfred Mentink was arrested in East Timor in 2003. (ABC News)

"I find myself with five kids from three different mothers."

He said some of what happened haunts him.

"You might be a narcissistic man. I do not know why you choose to have relationships with children rather than adults," he said.

"That is an issue for you mate

"That is something you need to live with and think very deeply while you are in jail about what you have done."

'We want action'

Mr Johnston now serves on the Queensland Child Sexual Abuse Legislative Reform Committee and advocates for those affected by abuse.

He said the royal commission had made some people accountable, but not enough.

"People who have covered up this sort of stuff need to be held to account," he said.

"There is not one person in Australia that I am aware of that has been convicted of concealing these sorts of crimes.

"But I am sceptical that things will change."

On the final day of the royal commission yesterday, Justice Peter McClellan handed a book of survivors' harrowing accounts to the National Library of Australia.

"The conjunction of events that the royal commission has examined can only be described as a national tragedy," Justice McClellan said.

Queensland Child Protection Committee chair Elizabeth Kobierski said those words are not much different to those uttered by then prime minister Julia Gillard when she announced the commission in 2012.

"She called child abuse vile and hideous," Ms Kobierski said.

"The beginning and the end. Now people have recognised this has been a shocking experience for many young people.

"But I think we have only heard the tip of the iceberg.

"I notice some 15,000 people have come forward to different ways to tell their stories.

"I do not think that represents all those people impacted or currently impacted.

"This is an ongoing issue that we all have to pay attention to.

"In my strongest words I can say stand up adults, let's be protective, let's be aware and make sure our children get the best possible chance they have moving forward."

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