

RCFV - ANONYMOUS

Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

In confidence

I write as an individual victim/survivor of family violence. The form of family violence which I experienced was sexual abuse, perpetrated on me by my father when I was [REDACTED] years old. I hope that this submission by outlining my experience, its meaning for me and the repercussions for me and my family, can shed some light on an important societal issue which - unlike many other aspects of family violence and child abuse - has not yet received the sustained public scrutiny it warrants.

Recognition of child sexual abuse within the family as an issue of societal concern

The RCFV Issues Paper calling for submissions has requested submissions that 'help to improve the Royal Commission's understanding of gaps and problems in the response of our system, and our society, to family violence'. As far as I can determine, public discourse has not engaged with the issues around child sexual abuse within the family; not its existence, not its impact, nor what to do about preventing it, nor how to best support survivors. I believe that until there is public recognition of the problem and pressure for policies designed to combat and redress this form of child abuse, there will necessarily be gaps and problems in the response of our system and our society to dealing with incest, and victims will continue to be socially isolated and experience emotional and psychological damage.

I have chosen to write this submission to ensure that the pervasive and devastating impact of incest is taken into consideration by the RCFV. The definition of family violence as set out in the terms of reference of the RCFV includes behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person which is abusive, threatening, coercive or dominating or controlling in other ways. Child sexual abuse perpetrated within the family certainly meets the definition of family violence, but there has been remarkably little discussion of incest in recent media. Understandably, horrific family violence which has resulted in homicide, particularly of children and women, has been the focus of considerable media attention, as has institutional child sexual abuse; but it is of great concern to me that there has been little public attention given to the impact of child sexual abuse occurring within the family.

For me, the lack of attention to this issue serves to reinforce the taboo on incest. I particularly deplore family violence in all of its forms and the protection of women and children from homicide and physical abuse is urgent and should have primacy in social policy; similarly, it is of utmost importance to ensure that those who experienced institutional child sexual abuse can obtain justice. But I contend that unless there is public scrutiny of the nature and impact of incest, the burden of processing the abuse and its attendant psychological trauma will rest on individual victims. Indeed, the impact of child sexual abuse within the family can reverberate through to subsequent generations. Concomitantly, keeping the issue of incest private allows perpetrators to avoid confronting the implications of their crimes, giving them refuge and denying victims/survivors any sense of justice.

My experience – and my reflections on it

The circumstances of my abuse were that when I was six years old, on three separate occasions my father masturbated me. This took place when he and I were in my parents' bed, when my mother

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had gotten up to make breakfast for the family. Usually, the first thing in the morning my elder brother and I would do would be to go in to my parents' bedroom to have time together for stories or cuddles, before we all got up. On the occasions when my father had touched my genitals, he and I had stayed in the bed after the others had left, so there were no witnesses to what happened.

This abuse had a continuing negative impact on me, robbing me of trust at an early age, leading me to experience an enduring and overwhelming sense of shame and confusion over sexual feelings, undermining my self-confidence and compromising my intimate relationships with others. Only as an adult in my late thirties did I develop the courage to seek out counselling, when I initiated the first of several series of counselling sessions. Even after years of reflection under belated professional guidance, I cannot say that I have been able to 'resolve' or 'come to terms with' the fact of my past abuse. I remain with highly conflicted feelings. Shame, insecurity, self-blame and mistrust of others are central to my character, but I strive to repress these emotions. I have tried to create a pathway to self-respect, seeking to explain, reassess and repair interactions with family members, yet I have experienced a sense of insurmountable isolation from them. My goals are still unclear and conflicted: as much as I aspire to being a strong and forgiving person, able to rise above and well beyond the shame, hurt and vulnerability of my childhood, trying to put aside vindictiveness and opting to engage in an independent, good, charitable life offering practical and emotional support to others, I recognise that I also have an enduring underlying grievance that is reinvoked (albeit silently) upon any contact with my father, and on some level whenever I have contact with any member of my family.

My family relationships are continually tested because as an adult I chose to confront my father and to reveal my past abuse to my mother and siblings. This inconvenient truth was hard for them to hear, but each of my siblings offered me statements of support, although since then our conversations have generally been limited to superficial conversations, or uncomfortable silence, open to interpretation. However supportive they may wish to be, they are very wary of upsetting me.

My relationship with my mother was immensely difficult. I felt distanced from my mother because of feelings of guilt and shame, and because my father instructed me not to tell my mother about the abuse. I felt I had betrayed my mother and I felt unworthy of her affection. My mother always maintained a high level of decorum and propriety, in keeping with her beliefs and values as a [REDACTED], practising member of the [REDACTED] (as was my father, whose parents throughout their adult lives, were senior [REDACTED]).

While my mother could be thought of as being 'straight-laced', my father was a 'touchy-feely', ribald character, always testing the limits of decency, even in public. My mother had a marked distaste for any story or image or conversation remotely relating to sexual attraction, let alone sexual activity, which I believe she developed as an attempt to counterbalance my father's blatant overfriendliness (particularly towards women) and his interest in gossip and salacious stories or representations. She did not tolerate any questions or comments from me which might have strayed into subjects to do with sexual behaviour.

I was the only daughter in my family, with [REDACTED] brothers. As the only daughter, unsurprisingly I was socialised differently to my brothers, and my mother emphasised the importance of decorum and

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charged me with a responsibility to 'act like a lady at all times'. She avoided any discussion of my feelings or physical changes.

My conflicted feelings around my abuse exacerbated the gender difference between we [REDACTED] siblings – I was mistrustful of men, and felt I could not confide in anyone in my family - and I experienced isolation within the family as well as outside it.

As a child growing up, I developed some protective strategies, even though I also came to engage in risky behaviours. I had no trust in any religious beliefs; I drew conclusions that men had the power to oppress their family members, and that being a visibly active member of a church was no guarantee that a person was trustworthy or followed religious observance in private. I learnt to keep my confused thoughts to myself and I felt that the most I could do to signal my abhorrence at my past abuse was to avoid my father, recoiling from any physical contact with him. At an early age I formed a resolve to leave the family home as soon as I had sufficient resources. Until then, I had emotions of sadness, impatience and powerlessness (all feelings frequently associated with adolescence).

Throughout my later childhood and adolescence I had extremely confused sexual feelings. I experienced strong sexual feelings teamed with revulsion for my father, which made me feel alternately ashamed and reckless and lustful. At the age of [REDACTED], I engaged in promiscuous sexual activity with boys of my age, which I construe now as a misguided effort to obliterate from my innermost thinking the notion that my father was a sexual partner to me. I was looking for a new relationship to 'rescue' me, as well as a way to 'escape' the family. I was seeking to assert a sense of independence and adulthood, including sexual adulthood, although I was also aware that promiscuity was not endorsed by anyone I knew as a mark of adulthood. I adopted behaviour which made me open and vulnerable to all forms of sexual activity with boys and men. Understandably, this behaviour ostracised me from my female peers at school. My behaviour inevitably came to the attention of the school authorities and eventually led to my expulsion (as soon as I had reached the age of [REDACTED]). I was required to meet with police for an assessment to determine whether or not I should be institutionalised. In the event I was cautioned and required to meet with a psychiatrist. As this was at the school's insistence or recommendation and at my family's expense, I was diffident about the consultations and unaware of any potential for change, so stopped attending after three sessions. I did not reveal my father's abuse of me during any of the conversations I had with school authorities, my mother, the police or the psychiatrist. I felt too much shame to introduce any talk about my child abuse at this time.

For a period of about 4 months I was able to finish the calendar year working in a retail position, away from peers. The next year, I began at a new high school situated at enough distance from my home to enable me to complete my senior secondary years without the prejudice of my peers being aware of my promiscuous past. Even so, with my activity under more constraint and surveillance, I contrived to put myself at risk.

At the age of [REDACTED], I thought I was now grown up enough and sufficiently sophisticated to recast myself in a new role; I had more of a sense of self-respect now that I saw myself as making my way in the world, with no need to engage in desperate acts of casual sex. Walking home one day, I met some of the boys I had previously been sexual partners with, and chatted with them, mistakenly allowing myself to think that they were interested in me as a person, accepting me as more

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independent and a changed person. Foolishly, I walked with them and they lured me into a house along the way where I was overpowered and violently raped by one of the boys. After considerable resistance, I was able to appeal to the others present to let me go and I went home. My facial injuries were obvious and I told my parents what had happened. They initiated a report to the police, which led to my examination by the police surgeon, police taking my statement, then a hearing in the local Magistrates' Court and then a two day trial almost two years later in the city County Court. (The outcome was that the perpetrator was put on a good behaviour bond for two years for the offence of carnal knowledge.)

Fortunately, in the following year, I was able to pursue my studies and lived my life independently and away from the immediate environs of my family home, so I did not have to come into contact with anyone else I knew from my early adolescence. I deliberately kept out of the public eye, always using an unlisted phone number, living in some degree of fear of reprisal from any person who may have sought revenge from me. Even today, despite having a professional career, for reasons of fear I try to keep my online profile extremely limited, and I do not use social media.

My mother's knowledge of my sexual exploits cemented the rift between her and me. She must have found my behaviour not only unconscionable but also inexplicable. For many years she had tacitly behaved as if my coldness towards my father was inexcusable, stemming from my inadequacies and wilful nature. When I was ■ or ■, perhaps a year after the County Court proceedings, my mother challenged me about why I was so negative and hateful towards my father ('Your father loves you and has always provided for you, why are you so negative towards him? Why do you hate your father? Why? *Why?*').

I felt cornered. I read my mother's questioning as purely rhetorical, with the aim of persuading me to be more loving towards my father, and not for the purpose of probing me about any possible wrongdoing on his part. I felt that if I was going to be pushed to talk about my feelings towards my father, I was going to tell the truth. It was time to defend myself, and for the first time I told her about my father having abused me. She said 'You are lying!', which I immediately denied. To make clear that I was not concocting a story, I was more explicit, saying 'He used his fingers'. The conversation ended then; she was speechless and did not question me any further. The specificity of my response had the ring of truth, although she chose not to give me any acknowledgement that she heard it. The way I saw it, what I had told her meant, among other things, that she was left with a conundrum; even if she avoided approaching the question of whether to take sides in support either of me or of her husband, she had to change her approach to me. Unless she wanted to talk with me head on (definitely not her style!) about incest and all its consequences, from then on when she talked to me she would need to tiptoe around any subject that might potentially relate to how my father and I interacted.

I left the family home as a ■ year old university student. I felt misunderstood, emotionally dependent, insecure and lacking in confidence, and I was a difficult and unpredictable person. I had a series of unsatisfactory relationships. I made more than one attempt on my own life and after one occasion went to a psychiatrist for assistance. This session did not delve very deep and I left the consultation feeling chastened for not taking responsibility for myself.

I was an unpredictable mood-swinger. However, between the lows, I had many highs. Although few of my many relationships lasted more than a few months, I did benefit from the love and

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understanding given to me. I learnt more trust and sustained longer-term relationships. I was able to concentrate on my studies and progress my teaching and research career.

It was not until I was a married woman aged [REDACTED] and a new mother that I peeled back the layers to explore the factors behind my insecurities. Soon after our daughter was born, my husband and I had constant disagreements and we had sought marriage counselling. At these sessions, among the other issues we discussed, I talked about how my father's abuse had affected me and my relationships. Although the counselling sessions did not help me and my husband to achieve resolution, and we separated and later divorced, for me the process was very helpful, because the counsellor referred me to relevant literature and to counselling through CASA (the Centre Against Sexual Assault). I followed this advice.

So, belatedly, I came to seek counselling around the issue of my child sexual abuse. I wanted to address my feelings of shame and insecurity, and also I wanted to see if there was any way I could protect my baby girl so that she could have some sort of relationship with her grandparents and still be safe.

I attended six sessions with a very informed and supportive CASA counsellor. During this time, I met with other victims of incest in a support group and I talked with as many friends (and acquaintances whom I knew had some professional insight into family violence issues) as I could – I am indebted to them for their willingness to listen despite the discomfort of having to hear me out. (At various intervals over subsequent years, to find a way forward when I became 'stuck', I was able to access 6-session programs. To date, I have attended a total of six such sessions, with six different counsellors in other practices.)

After the first series of discussions with the CASA counsellor, together with considerable reading and much reflection, I resolved to confront my parents.

I told them that I felt that my past abuse had not been appropriately recognised and that I could not be sure of my daughter's safety in their presence. I told them that I wanted them to think over what could be done to make her safe, and that, although I hoped that I could be able to be forgiving, I did not know if I could; I certainly could not forget what had happened to me, and naturally I felt fearful for my daughter. I told them that as a victim I had rights which should be respected, and that it was one of my rights to consider every option available to me for redress, including the option of legal action, the option of not seeing them again, the option of talking to others in the family, the option of forgiving, the option of discussing everything with them, and of researching other options I didn't yet know of. What I could not do, though, was to continue to live a lie, as if the abuse had never happened. I told them that I needed two weeks to think over what I should do and that if I could work out what I needed to do I would let them know then, but I didn't want any contact with them while I sorted through what was on my mind.

During that time, I phoned my brothers to tell them about my abuse and I sought their support. Although they each found the issue repugnant ('It is horrible') and difficult to talk about, they were each able to give me honest responses, expressing sadness, kindness towards me, and also a degree of amazement that they had not realised independently what had been the cause of my stilted behaviour towards my father: my revelation explained a lot to them!

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My father wrote me a short letter of apology, stating that he was sorry for his acts, and that he had 'put a stop to it as soon as he could'. He stated his love for me and telling me that he had never apologised to me for his abuse out of fear of making it worse for me, as he imagined that I would have responded to him with 'don't talk about all that stuff again!'

For me, this letter was laden with double-meanings and rationalisations, but I thought it was as good an apology as I was going to get.

After two weeks, I assessed my position. I had aired the issue; I had put my father on notice and alerted all my family members so that, in a way, they were each given some responsibility for ensuring that my father could not reoffend. My mother had a particular responsibility, and she told me that she was sorry that she had not talked more with me and expressed her concern for me around the time when I had first told her of the abuse, twenty years before.

I knew that I could not proceed 'as if nothing had ever happened', but I had little faith that there could be any legal remedy: I had been wronged, but I did not want to punish for the sake of punishment. I thought I had 'punished' my father in the sense of having told my family about my abuse; I did not think pursuit of a legal course would yield me any additional serenity and I thought that it would only create deeper animosity and inflict pain. I did not even explore whether I would have any claim under law for violation that had occurred twenty years previously. I thought it best to take an approach based on strength and self-respect, free of vengeance or pettiness. I thought I could be a better person by forgoing any right I had to take my grievance to a wider, public stage. I felt I didn't have to do more to belittle my father in public; I knew I had right on my side, and I didn't need any adjudicator to assess my case and tell me so. In one sense, I didn't need to bring my father down so that I could be 'cured' or vindicated: the way I saw it, there wasn't going to be any cure for me, and reviewing my options seemed to leave me with a situation of 'damned if I do and damned if I don't'.

My ideal was to be responsible, informed, stable, caring and protective of others. I thought that although I could not forget the abuse, I could adopt a position of forgiveness towards my father, and in the process prove myself to be the best person I could be. By so doing, not only would I avoid causing others further distress - particularly my mother - but I could quiet one of the leading arguments put forward in my head by my internal critic.

I still agonise over whether or not I made the right choice. Should I have been more forthright and asserted my rights to full justice – to have my day in court, as it were? Would I have found support had I chosen to do so? Would I have done a public service by making a statement about a 'private' crime that has had profound repercussions? After all, there are definite public consequences of this private crime, including my intermittent reliance on the 'public' health system to help me grapple with my depression and self-loathing. In doing so, would I have benefited anyone other than myself? Should I have drawn attention to the neglected issue of incest? Was it a cop-out that I decided against any legal recourse?

The legacy of incest on the next generation

As a mother, I believe that the abuse I suffered has had a tragic impact on my daughter, my only child. I have been preoccupied in protecting my daughter from my father (and from any predatory

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sexual behaviour), but I feel that I have been powerless to protect her from the emotional turmoil which I see as the indirect continuing impact of my past abuse.

Through engaging in many different conversations with my parents and with my siblings, discussing the fact of my past abuse and the concerns I had to protect my young daughter (and indeed, any of my nephews) from any sexual abuse from my father, I had tried to ensure that my father was outed within the family, made to express contrition, and given no opportunity to revisit his abuse on my daughter. I was hoping that by invoking the help of others in my family, my daughter would be able to enjoy a healthy and trouble-free relationship with my parents – in short, to have a normal relationship with them. However, I was still beset by questions: Do I put my daughter at risk if I leave her with my parents for any length of time? Am I putting too much trust in my mother's ability to protect my daughter from my father's potential predation? In any case, is there any indicator for what is 'normal' in a 'normal' relationship between father and granddaughter and is it possible in this case? (I certainly knew what was 'abnormal', but didn't know whether it was possible to salvage from the mess of intra-familial relationships something for her that would fall within the acceptable, were it possible to map relationships on a normal distribution curve.) In view of the estrangement between me and her father (whose parents lived overseas), the relationship between my daughter and my parents had even more significance. Does it matter if a grandchild has little contact with grandparents? While I have been committed to ensuring her safety, sense of security and self-awareness, I also have feelings of self-reproach for being overprotective of her. Have I allowed her to form her own opinions or imposed mine on her?

I do not want to go too far into the details of my daughter's situation for the purposes of this submission, as it remains her story. Fortunately, my father did not engage in any sexual acts with her, but she felt that he emotionally abused her in different ways, such as by engaging in constant argumentation and criticism of her food choices. Again, he was pushing the limits.

When my daughter was ten years old, my estranged husband told her about my abuse. This was a bombshell for her and exposed her to some of the ongoing effects of my abuse. Years later, she experiences feelings of intense resentment to me as well as uncontrollable rage towards members of my family, because she considers that neither I nor they have done enough to bring my father to justice. She considers that my siblings and their wives deny me affirmation and support, and that they deliberately choose to disregard any emotional discomfort I may experience when I attend family gatherings at their invitation which put me in the company of my father.

More importantly, she has experienced suicidal thoughts since she was very young. She first attempted self-harm when she was ■. She has been hospitalised on three occasions and has been in counselling for over ■ years. She has been diagnosed by psychiatrists variously as having dysthymia, depression and borderline personality disorder. At least to some extent, her fragile psychological state is due to the fact of my father's incest.

Calling incest out in public

Of course, many people have suffered incest, many in circumstances much more damaging than those which affected me. Many people who have experienced incest have gone through the court process in an effort to find justice. Yet there is little reportage about this in the media and there

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seems to be a culture of silence on the issue. The result of this 'media silence' is that each individual has to explore their own pathway to access support services, as I did.

Over the last three decades in particular, there has been growing awareness and concern about the damaging consequences of child abuse and concerted attempts have been made to track down and eliminate paedophile activity. Incidentally, it seems, that instances of incest have been reported only if there are the grossest circumstances – for example, if a man has made his child sexually available to others; or if a man held a woman captive as a sex slave and had children with her and also abused the children. But it seems that incest cases where men have acted alone in preying on their own children do not make big news – these instances tend not to make the news at all. Stories about sexual predators abusing *someone else's* children are the ones that grab the headlines.

Without reportage of such incidents of incest there is very limited public discussion of prevalence; without discussion of prevalence, there is no public outcry against incest – certainly not the same level of public concern that has been expressed in relation to institutional child abuse or in relation to the issue of violence towards adult women. Indeed, there is even far greater prominence in the media about animal welfare than there is about incest. There has been extensive media coverage and discussion about abuse perpetrated by members of religious and state institutions on children in their care, with close attention to the evidence unfolding at Royal Commission hearings. In the context of the issue of family violence, there has been overwhelming focus on incidents where physical violence has been perpetrated by men on their partners and on their children; so much so that the definition of family violence adopted in public discourse seems far narrower than the definition set out in the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*.

As a survivor, I believe this underreporting and avoidance of the subject of incest is because it is still considered to be too uncomfortable, abhorrent and distasteful to talk about incest. This may be partly because it is seen to intrude on the 'rights of the family' (that is, the rights of the *father*). (Why else is it appropriate to be outraged about institutional child abuse, and to have detailed coverage on national news bulletins, but it still be acceptable to ignore the crime of incest?) The way the media have discounted the issue of incest has the effect of silencing the incest victim, because there is little to encourage a victim to be the first to put up their hand for public judgement.

Over the years I often brooded on this anomaly and I have been mystified: why is there a taboo about incest, but apparently no such taboo on any other criminal act in the criminal code? Could it be that incest cases are not deemed to be newsworthy because they are commonplace, mundane and to be expected? Is it a girl's (or child's) place to be the plaything for the father? Is it a sign of weakness if a person talks publicly about their experience of incestuous abuse as a child? Is it because any attempt to apply the process of the law faces near insuperable obstacles? Or is the aversion to this discussion just a hangover from a time when patriarchy generally went unchallenged, when scandals were to be avoided at all costs, to the extent that unwed expectant mothers were spirited away for the duration of their pregnancies, and when no discussion of embarrassing topics which touched on the sanctity of church and the normality of nuclear family was ever to be aired in public? If the media silence on the issue is out of respect for the victim/survivor, I would ask why the strategies used to protect the identity of anonymous sources behind other sensitive stories have not been applied to stories of incest? There must be other unacknowledged issues in play.

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Supporting the ongoing safety and wellbeing of people affected by family violence

I have recorded these ongoing issues for me not because I suppose that it is the task of the RCFV to redress them, but in the hope that this reflection may give some added insight into the ongoing psychological torment occasioned by incest.

Whether or not these social, psychological and emotional difficulties would have existed had I not experienced sexual abuse as a child is impossible to determine.

This abbreviated version of my life history may appear to be a very biased account, full of rationalisations and an attempt to shift responsibility for my own reprehensible actions and errors of judgement onto others. I might be thought to be attributing far too much importance to some isolated incidents which occurred when I was ■■■ years old – more than five decades ago; I might be thought of as engaging in self-pity; harbouring a grievance so that I could blame my father for both my own shortcomings and the misfortunes of life – for the social inadequacies, sexual confusion and feelings of shame and self-consciousness that all humans experience to some degree in their childhood and adolescence. After all, many people suffer considerably worse in their lives than I have done. I could be construed as ungrateful and choosing to overlook the sacrifices my parents made for me. It could be argued that life is contradictory and unfair; every human has to face dilemmas and settle for the less-than-optimal conditions imposed by life as an imperfect being in an imperfect society. In short, it could be concluded that it would be best if I just forgot that my father abused me.

But I am unable to forget the abuse.

Regardless of how my actions are judged, I attribute profound psychological distress to the fact of my abuse. I continue to question myself about how I should have responded to my abuse and I still deliberate about what I should do about it now. I think my promiscuous adolescent behaviour was futile and costly to me and despite years of inner debate, I still consider my efforts to deal with the fall-out from my abuse as incomplete or inadequate. I am still at odds with myself and even now I cannot determine whether what I have done to heal myself and protect my daughter is sufficient or appropriate.

I will never know what sort of person I would have been like had the abuse never happened. I do not know what it would have been like if I had been able to grow up with self-assurance, free of the knowledge of the abuse, free of the feelings of distrust and disgust for my father, and without carrying feelings of shame which estranged me from my mother.

It has been a difficult process for me to write about my experience and my enduring sense of isolation, violation and disquiet. What I have written of my personal story offers a description of the nature of my experience and my reflection on it, but also demonstrates the processes of 'overthinking' to which I have been subject. By 'overthinking', I am referring to the incessant thoughts that circulate in my mind, creating a whirlpool of paralysis which have often dominated my inner thought processes and at times have had the effect of drawing me into uncontrollable depression. Throughout my early years I avoided any disclosure of my abuse; in my late teens I informed my mother; in my early adulthood I revealed my abuse to trusted partners; and only in my middle years did I seek out appropriate professional therapy.

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As I have detailed above, it was only as an adult that I was given advice that enabled me to access relevant professional assistance. It would have been far better if I had had this access earlier, and it should certainly have been offered at the time of my troubled adolescence, given that my behaviour had brought me into early contact with school and police and psychiatrist. I know that the particular resources I found useful at the age of [REDACTED] were not available when I was [REDACTED]; knowledge of the prevalence and impact of incest has progressed some way in 40 years. However, the specialist authorities on child guidance with whom I met when I was [REDACTED] did not apparently consider broaching the topic of incest with me. I believe that a direct invitation from a welfare professional to explore the dynamics in my family, especially the possibility of child sexual abuse, would have given me the permission and impetus to have revealed my personal history and would have facilitated my access to therapeutic assistance. I am not confident that even now there is sufficient awareness or open discussion of incest to give early assistance to troubled victims/survivors.

I applaud the terms of reference for the RCFV and uphold the seriousness of its mission. In view of my own personal history, I particularly urge the RCFV to use its unique authority to ensure that it accepts and promotes the need to address the full scope of family violence issues. It must recognise and promote the importance of countering the crime of incest, to ensure that the difficult issue of child sexual abuse within the family is not eclipsed by the urgency and immediacy of dealing with other horrific aspects of family violence which have already gained wide recognition.

Accordingly, I urge the RCFV to include in its recommendations some provisions to raise public awareness about the ongoing impact of incest, including the following measures:

- A public information campaign about the impact of incest and how victims/survivors are ostracised within the family and by the broader society;
- Additional research into the experiences of victims/survivors of incest, including the investigation of the trigger points which have served to enable victims/survivors to reveal past abuse, to enable more proactive and outreach counselling practices;
- Research into the notion of 'justice' in cases of incest (societal notions, legal interpretations, survivor/victim perspectives as well as other family member perspectives);
- The development and enhancement of support services for survivors of incest, including advertising services, accessible online information, counselling programs, incest victim/survivor support groups, to enable victims/survivors and others affected by the incidence of incest to promptly access support acceptable to them;
- The development and promotion of additional resources to facilitate specialised training for health and welfare professionals on how to provide best practice support to survivors of incest; and
- The establishment of a designated State Government-appointed, qualified, committed and experienced advocate as champion of the rights of victims/survivors of incest.