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# 'Big George would grab me from behind and molest me'

By Martin Daly, Steve Waldon Lee Glendinning and Lisa Pryor  
August 21 2002

The accuser is a man with a long criminal record. He is aged in his early 50s.

But around 1961, he says, he was a 12-year-old altar boy.

It was then, he alleges, that he was molested by a trainee priest he knew as Big George, at a Victorian seaside camp.

Dr George Pell, the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, stood aside yesterday after receiving inquiries from the *Herald's* sister paper, *The Age*, about the Melbourne man's allegations. The man had presented the claims to the church's National Committee for Professional Standards. The committee examines abuse claims under the church's Towards Healing process.

He claims he did not know that person had become a leader of the Catholic church until he saw a man in long purple robes on television referred to as Archbishop George Pell. He says he recognised him as Big George from the boys' camp.

His statement claims another boy had started a bushfire during the camp in an act of revenge after being sexually assaulted. This boy had spoken openly in later years about alleged abuse by Big George. A document from the church committee quotes the Melbourne man as claiming he had been indecently assaulted many times by Big George.

The document says: "Big George told the boys he had played in the ruck for Richmond."

It also quotes the alleged victim saying Big George would put his hands down his trousers and touch him until he pulled away. He would grab my hand when he could and would put my hand down his trousers.

"This would happen at play, in the water and on any occasion that it was possible. He was very skilful at grabbing me and forcing his hand down or grabbing my hand and forcing it down his pants. Especially when we were in our tents, Big George would come into the tents and start wrestling and having pillow fights and would grab and thrust his hand down my pyjama pants ...

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"In the dark we used to play games with torches where we would go off into the dark, Big George would grab me from behind and molest me.

"[He] would grab me on my own during the day if he had a chance."

The alleged victim also claims he saw Big George molest his friend at the camp "by putting his hand down [his] pants the way he put his hand down mine".

The Melbourne man went to Broken Rites, an organisation that represents abuse victims, after seeing Dr Pell on television.

He also confided in a priest friend who advised him to take action through Towards Healing.

The National Committee for Professional Standards, under chairman Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, of Sydney, and Sister Angela Ryan, of Melbourne, had already moved to investigate the complaint outside Towards Healing - because that process does not have the power to investigate a bishop whose superior is the Pope. The man rejected repeated advice from Bishop Robinson and Sister Ryan to go to the police. He was also advised to take his claims directly to the Pope or accept an investigation outside Towards Healing, which would have no power to enforce any action.

The allegations have lingered on an Adelaide website since August 9, published under the name "Xavier O'Byrne". The article was still posted last night, with two letters from the law firm Corrs Chambers Westgarth demanding the article be removed because it is "highly defamatory of the Archbishop".

The Catholic archbishops of Brisbane and Melbourne were eager to defend Dr Pell last night.

Brisbane's Archbishop John Bathersby said: "It would be nice for him to know tonight there a lot of people praying and a lot of people standing behind him."

Joe Pucci, of Australians Against Child Abuse, was pleased the church had instituted what seemed to be a transparent process. "I think that it is the right thing that any allegation is taken seriously ... even if it is vigorously defended by those who have been accused."

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