

**It took 30 years to find my voice, now I won't let others suffer in silence. Ken Clearwater, 66**



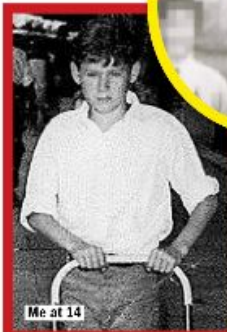
I was named in the Queen's Birthday Honours

I waved goodbye to Mum and headed for the bus stop. All up, the journey home would take two separate buses from the hospital on New Zealand's South Island where she was recovering from an operation, but I was 12 and confident enough to travel on my own.

At the bus stop, I noticed a young man who smiled and introduced himself as Jay\*. We started chatting as we hopped on the bus. I told him about my love of cycling and rugby. When we got to my stop, Jay offered to wait with me until my next bus arrived. 'Let's go to the toilet,' he said, motioning towards a public toilet. I followed him inside a cubicle, where he pulled down his pants, then mine. Freezing in terror, I felt his hands touching me down below. 'It's our secret,' he whispered. 'Don't tell anyone or you'll be in trouble.'



I was 12 when I was abused



Me at 14

Afterwards, he followed me onto the second bus. I was shaking. What had this strange bloke just done to me? Once again, Jay got off at my stop and instructed me to go with him to another public toilet. Too scared to object, I did as he said and the same horrible thing happened. I wanted to run away or cry for help, but I was petrified. After he'd finished with me, I rushed home and locked myself in my bedroom. Jay must've followed me because he started turning up outside all the time. One evening, he invited me to his place. I didn't know what he'd do if I said no, so I reluctantly nodded. 'Take off your clothes and climb into bed,' he instructed when he ushered me into his house. I tried not to think about the rape that happened next. The pain and the shame overwhelmed me so much that I became angry and disruptive at school, frequently lashing out.

As told to Astha Gupta

# I thought it was ONLY ME

But Jay still had me under his control. I was too scared to tell anyone what he'd done to me. One day, I was out with him when two police cars pulled up and took us to the station. What was going on? Mum was waiting there for me. She explained how the school principal had called her about my unruly behaviour. When she couldn't find me, she'd called the police, who found me and Jay sitting together. Jay was sentenced to a youth detention centre on two charges of indecent assault after confessing to abusing me. At last, I thought, I'm free. But the torment had taken its toll on me: I started drinking and smoking, going off the rails badly. I didn't want Jay to ruin my life, though, so when I was out with friends and met a woman, I thought nothing of going into her bedroom. The second I entered, she forced my hand towards her crotch. 'Drop your pants,' she ordered. When I did, she took one look at my penis and laughed. 'You're not a real man,' she spat. I felt the same shame and humiliation that I'd experienced with Jay all over again.

**'They stripped me naked'**

Then my drinking spiralled out of control and I was expelled from school after hitting a teacher. Drifting between jobs, I felt worthless until I met a woman who finally showed me real love and affection. 'I like you,' she said. I couldn't believe someone would say that to me. For the next three years, we dated and I proposed to her. At the time, I was in the army and a few nights before our wedding, I went out with some colleagues, got extremely drunk and was attacked by a bunch of men. I tried as hard as I could to fight them off, but there were too many of them. Laughing, they stripped me naked, smeared my genitals with jam and left me on the floor. I thought marriage would be the start of a new chapter of my life, but I couldn't find the confidence to tell my wife about my damaged childhood: what if she didn't believe me? So I kept quiet and we had two children together: Victoria and Stacey. Being a father was nerve-wracking for me. I couldn't take my girls to the park or a beach because I was

I'll never stop fighting

terrified someone would accuse me of being a paedophile. I know that sounds strange, but Jay had made me overly paranoid. Finally, by the time the girls were teenagers, my wife decided she'd had enough of my difficult ways and erratic moods and we divorced. The girls stayed with me. 'I'm sorry I haven't been the best dad,' I told them. 'Bad stuff happened to me when I was little.'

They both hugged me tight. 'We love you, it's OK,' Victoria said sweetly. But that alone wasn't enough to pull me out of my depression. At my lowest point, I even thought of taking my life. I truly believed the world would be better off without me until, one morning, the girls knocked on my bedroom door. 'We need breakfast,' Stacey said.

Although Stacey was 11 and Victoria was 14, I'd always got them their brekkie each morning. Suddenly, I realised I had to pull myself together. I was their dad and they needed me. Over the years, I saw several psychologists, trying to find my way back. One day, I saw an advert in a local newspaper for a support group for male survivors of sexual abuse. All this time, I'd thought I was suffering alone, but there were other victims. Too many. When the Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse Trust in Christchurch was formed, I agreed to be on the board. 'Why are you doing this?' friends and family asked me. It was time to tell them the truth, so I explained everything. Many were shocked. It's taken me 30 years to speak up and find my voice, but my bravery has paid off. I'm now an officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit, for my work helping men. I advocate for male survivors of sexual trauma to receive appropriate and timely support services, and will continue to



Me and my mum

work towards these services being available throughout New Zealand. I'm also working with the NZ Minister of Defence about my attack in the army. I still have bad days, but I'm not ready to give up. My childhood stopped when I was 12, and I won't let that happen to another kid.

● Jay is a false name

If you or anyone know is struggling to cope, contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or visit [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)



With my kids and grandkids