

**ABUSE IN CARE ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY  
TULOOU – OUR PACIFIC VOICES: TATALA E PULONGA**

**Under** The Inquiries Act 2013

**In the matter of** The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions

**Royal Commission:** Judge Coral Shaw (Chair)  
Ali'imua Sandra Alofivae  
Mr Paul Gibson  
Dr Anaru Erueti  
Ms Julia Steenson

**Counsel:** Mr Simon Mount QC, Ms Kerryn Beaton QC,  
Ms Tania Sharkey, Mr Semisi Pohiva, Ms Reina Va'ai, Ms Nicole Copeland, Ms Sonja Cooper, Ms Amanda Hill for the Royal Commission  
Ms Rachael Schmidt-McCleave, Ms Julia White and Ms Alana Ruakere for the Crown  
Mr Alex Winsley for the Bishops and Congregational Leaders of the Catholic Church in Aotearoa New Zealand

**Venue:** Fale o Samoa  
141 Bader Drive  
Māngere  
AUCKLAND

**Date:** 22 July 2021

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**TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

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1 **[10.00 am]**

2 **CHAIR:** Yes Ms Va'ai.

3 **MS VA'AI:** Lagi e mama ma le soifua manuia. Ou te faatalofa atu i a outou afioga. Ia, faatulou  
4 atu i le paia o le maota o lo tatou faatasi i leni itula. Good morning Commissioners.

5 **CHAIR:** Good morning. Before we start I'm going to invite the Reverend Naisali and also to  
6 welcome the Kiribati community who have honoured us with their presence today.

7 **REVEREND NAISALI: [Introduction in Kiribati]** It's a beautiful morning when we gather  
8 together here today and as we journey together our canoe to reach our destination. In  
9 Kiribati we need a paddle and everybody must be not spectators, no tourists but shall we  
10 participate, especially our voice so that our voice could be heard. **[Proverb in Kiribati –**  
11 **41.44]** means may his blessings, we shake the spiritual world to connect, because by  
12 connecting to the spiritual world we can connect to the ocean, to the mountains, to the  
13 people and that is the holistic wellbeing of our journey. Shall we pray in Kiribati. **[Prayer**  
14 **in Kiribati].**

15 **CHAIR:** Ms Va'ai, before we start I'm going to invite Ali'imuumua Sandra to greet the family of  
16 Pulotu Solomon.

17 **MS VA'AI:** Yes.

18 **PULOTU ARTHUR GUS SOLOMON (read by TUPE SOLOMON-TANOA'D)**

19 **COMMISSIONER ALOFIVAE:** I le agaga fa'aaloalo, ou te fa'atalofa atu. E avea lou leo e fai  
20 ma sui o le matou taitai fa'atasi ma le au Komesina I le aiga maualuga o Pulotu. Lau afioga  
21 Pulotu Selio fa'atasi ma si ou tuafafine pele, Tupe. Fa'atasi ma si ou tina ma uo ma e ua  
22 mafai ona omai e lagolago I leni taeao. Matou te fa'atalofa atu foi I si ou tama pele, lea ua  
23 matou tala lea e fa'alogo mai via the live stream. Fa'afetai I le alofa ma le agalelei o le  
24 Atua ona mafai ona tatou feiloai I leni taeao matagofie I le lagi e mama ma le soifua maua.  
25 Talofa talofa lava.

26 **CHAIR:** Thank you Ms Va'ai. And we appreciate that you, Tupe, are here to speak on behalf of  
27 your father and because he has already made his affirmation in the body of his document,  
28 we won't take that from now. So, I'm just going to leave you with Ms Va'ai. Thank you  
29 very much.

30 **QUESTIONING BY MS VA'AI:** Thank you Madam Chair.

31 Tupe, just echoing the words of le Afioga ia Ali'imuumua, thank you for being here.  
32 I also acknowledge your family who are seated behind me as well. Thank you. Before we  
33 get into introductions, formal introductions from you, I understand that you would like to  
34 open with a tatalo.

1 A. Ia tatou tatalo. Le Atua le Tama, le Atua le Alo, e Atua le Agaga Paia. Fa'afetai i le ola ma  
2 le malosi ua matou maua. Le Tama e, ia e puipui lau fanau i ou aao alofa. E ala i le suafa  
3 pele o Iesu Keriso. Amene.

4 **Q.** Fa'afetai lava Tupe. Now that we've opened with the tatalo, a Samoan prayer, I'm  
5 wondering if you could please introduce yourself and explain why you're here today.

6 A. Talofa lava, malo e soifua ma le lagi e mama ni bula vinaka. My name is Tupe  
7 Solomon-Tanoa'i and I'm the daughter of Pulotu Arthur Gus Solomon. I'm joined here with  
8 my brothers and sisters, children, my husband and nephews and nieces. Pulotu is the  
9 chiefly title of my father. He is 77 years old. His title comes from the village of  
10 Malaemalu in the district of Falealili in Samoa. I'm representing my father because he has  
11 multiple health issues, including Parkinson's disease which has severely limited his  
12 mobility. He seldom leaves the house.

13 My father wanted to go on record to validate the voices of survivors. I feel the gravity of  
14 the pain and suffering that we are discussing throughout this Commission. But I feel that  
15 telling my father's story is one of the most significant things that I can do to support him in  
16 his old age.

17 **Q.** Thank you Tupe. Now I understand that you had conversations with your father le Afioga  
18 ia Pulotu and you're going to read excerpts from his statement which he provided to the  
19 Inquiry; is that correct?

20 A. Yes.

21 **Q.** Thank you. When you begin, please feel free to take your time. If you need to take a  
22 break, just look at me.

23 A. Okay. So these are my father's words.

24 **CHAIR:** Before you start, I'm sorry to interrupt you, you may have had this explained; this is  
25 being typed and it's also being signed, so if you could keep an eye on the speed, thank you.

26 A. **[Nods].** "I am of Samoan and Palagi extraction, but I was born in Fiji and did my  
27 schooling there. I moved to New Zealand when I was 18 years old.

28 The purpose of this statement is to talk about my time working at Ōwairaka Boys'  
29 Home in Auckland. I worked there as a watchman from December 1970 for about four  
30 weeks. In that four weeks I saw so much violence that I had to get out of there. I couldn't  
31 stay there any longer. I left around the end of January 1971 to teach at St Mary's Convent  
32 Primary School in Avondale.

33 In around 1962 when I was about 18 years old, the brothers in Fiji sent me to  
34 New Zealand to become a Marist Brother. This was before the thick of the Dawn Raids,

1 when we had to be so careful we felt that we had to wear our passports around our necks in  
2 case we were ever stopped in the street by Police.

3 It was about Christmas time in 1970 when I started working at Ōwairaka as a  
4 watchman. I was about 26 years old at the time. It was very different from what I had  
5 come from at St Paul's. I felt that St Paul's was a loving place where kids were looked  
6 after. On the other hand, this place was harsh and tough. It was not a happy place.

7 I remember going to an interview and filling out an application form. I think it  
8 was Mr Ricketts who interviewed me, he was the headmaster or boss.

9 I also had to do a medical check-up by the doctor at Ōwairaka. I can't recall  
10 whether or not it was part of the recruitment process. The reason I remember doing a  
11 medical check-up is because I addressed the doctor as 'Doc' and that made him angry. He  
12 said 'Don't call me Doc, it's Doctor to you.' That incident really put me off speaking up and  
13 instead I thought sheesh, you really need to keep quiet here.

14 As a watchman I was just somebody there to make sure that the boys were doing  
15 their chores, work or whatever it was that they were assigned to do, and to ensure that they  
16 did not abscond. It was a different role to that of the guard.

17 Nothing was mentioned about training like it is today, where the emphasis is on  
18 up-skilling and training people. Maybe it was because I wasn't there long enough and they  
19 may have mentioned it if I was there longer. I also don't remember any staff meetings  
20 being held in the time I was there.

21 Mr Ricketts was my boss. I didn't see him often. In the four weeks that I was  
22 there I would have seen him four times. He was in his office all the time like a mystery  
23 man and we hardly talked.

24 I was assigned to work with Mr Pickering and he was the person who told me how  
25 things were done at Ōwairaka. He was like the foreman and he was Mr Ricketts' right  
26 hand.

27 Mr Pickering was a young, European, English fellow who I remember drove a  
28 Land Rover. I think he had an Army or Navy background and he used to tell me about how  
29 he was a military man. He was nasty and wore his socks and shoes like a Navy man and  
30 his shorts and belt. He used to hold a baton while at work. I don't recall any other staff as  
31 being Pacific or Māori. Even though I cannot recall every detail, I remember the names  
32 Mr Ricketts and Mr Pickering because they were so bad that they stood out to me.

33 The boys at Ōwairaka were mainly Māori and Pacific Islanders. Even so, no  
34 attention was ever paid to the Treaty of Waitangi. In those days the Treaty was nothing.

1 Thank God we've got something now.

2 A typical day at Ōwairaka for the boys would be to wake up, have breakfast,  
3 attend an assembly, do cleaning chores, work in the garden, have lunch, go for a bus ride  
4 and then have dinner.

5 Every day at the assemblies Mr Pickering would have the boys line up before their  
6 duties were given to them. He would get them to stand up straight and would use a baton  
7 and push it into their stomachs to make sure they stood up straight. Staff that were assigned  
8 to work with me also carried batons for this purpose.

9 Each morning the boys had to sweep the dormitories and foyers, wipe down the  
10 windows, dust the ledges and clean the toilets. One thing I remember was the way  
11 Mr Pickering told me to supervise the boys' chores in the morning. He told me to never  
12 pass off their work as good the first time. He would tell me 'Always say no, it's not good, at  
13 least three times.' He told me that if they're wiping down the window sills don't pass it until  
14 they've done it three times. Same with the toilets. It was a way of disciplining the boys. It  
15 really got to me. I would tell myself no, no, this is not me. It made me want to leave.

16 I was not aware if there were any educational programmes provided at Ōwairaka.  
17 That may have been because I was there during the Christmas and new year period, I'm not  
18 sure.

19 We were not allowed to fraternise with the boys. The other staff would tell me if  
20 you do that then you become weak. If the boys were found speaking to me, senior staff  
21 would frown on them.

22 Not being able to speak with the boys was really against what I had come from, so  
23 I found that very hard. But still, I used to talk to them at night. I used to ask, 'How are  
24 you?' At first the boys were suspicious, wondering whether I was for real or not, whether I  
25 was trying to get information from them. I could tell they were reluctant to say anything.  
26 But after a couple of weeks of talking to them, I think some of them knew that I was on  
27 their side. But I didn't want to push it because if they were found talking to me, then they  
28 would be in trouble. It was a sad place.

29 Absconding was a word that I got to know very quickly. Mr Pickering used to say  
30 'Any absconding, don't panic, go to the phone, ring up. If the managers are not here, just  
31 ring up the Police and they will be here within hours.' Sure enough, maybe a few days after  
32 that spiel, one of the boys took off and the phone was used to call the cops. Within hours,  
33 the boy was back and put into the secure unit.

34 Mr Pickering asked me if I knew what happens to the boys who go into the secure

1 unit. When I replied no, he said that 'We put them in there for the night and next day.' We  
2 - referring to the guards - go in and we give them such a thrashing that they do not want to  
3 go out again. He confirmed that that was what the secure unit was for.

4 On Sundays Mr Pickering ran a sort of games afternoon. I remember very clearly  
5 the boxing that would take place where the boys would be forced to box each other. The  
6 staff would deliberately pair them off, especially if we noticed during the week that some  
7 were fighting or were not happy with one another.

8 We would go to a place where a ring was set up and we all watched as they  
9 hammered one another to virtually pulp. The boxings were attended by staff that were  
10 rostered on that day, and at least a couple of our heads were there too watching and  
11 cheering the boys on. All the kids were also made to stand on and cheer. One of the guards  
12 would act as a referee by keeping time for each boxing round and starting each round by  
13 saying 'Ready, fight.' Everyone was forced to be a part of the afternoon's 'entertainment'.

14 I am not aware of the boys receiving any rewards for boxing. I also don't  
15 remember any boys refusing to box. If they did, I don't remember what happened to them.  
16 During the time I was there, there were at least two boxing sessions.

17 Watching the boxing made me feel crook, but it was part of the system. Being a  
18 newcomer to the place, I didn't want to open my mouth so I just sat there and watched.

19 I struggled with the job because it wasn't what I wanted. I wanted to help and  
20 teach the kids in any way I could. But that wasn't my function here. My function was just  
21 to watch, make sure that they were there, make sure they were supervised going to the toilet  
22 and make sure they didn't run away. It was a pretty thankless job.

23 The most grievous or grave incident that really worried me and caused me to make  
24 up my mind to leave was an incident involving Mr Ricketts. One day I was in his office  
25 and a smallish boy was brought in. A few questions were asked and before I could realise  
26 what was happening, Mr Ricketts lunged at him, punching and kicking him. I thought to  
27 myself what is going on here? The boy was on the floor. His mate was standing there and  
28 so was I, as this poor kid was hammered to a pulp. It happened so fast. That's when  
29 I thought that's it, I'm out of here. I can't recall why Mr Ricketts beat the boy.

30 I consider myself a champion at lifting up image and confidence and making  
31 people feel good. That's my job. That's why I couldn't stay there. It was just the complete  
32 opposite of what I was trained to do. It was a sad environment and one that I was not  
33 accustomed to, especially coming from an educational institute.

34 I remember my colleague's advice to me was, 'Keep your trap shut, just do your

1 work, don't say anything too much.' It made me question what was going on there but she  
2 would reassure me saying, 'No, just play it by the book.' So I left it at that.

3 I never told anyone about what I saw at Ōwairaka. I felt helpless to say or do  
4 anything about what I saw because the abuse was coming straight from the top. I did not  
5 feel I could make any difference, so I only stayed for a short period of time."

6 **Q.** Thank you Tupe. In your father's statement he actually made a few recommendations. I'm  
7 going to take you to paragraph 57 of his statement, if you could please read that.

8 **CHAIR:** Do you want to take a small break before you do that?

9 **A.** I'm just - yeah, I'm fine. Thank you. "The kids in these institutions are there for a reason,  
10 so there is no use sending them to places where people will not look after them properly.  
11 What these kids need are people to be supportive, talk to them, care for them, be patient  
12 with them and listen to them."

13 **QUESTIONING BY MS VA'AI CONTINUED:** Thank you. Just finally, I have a few questions  
14 for you, Tupe. Your father, Pulotu, shared in his statement that he never told anyone about  
15 what he witnessed and he's 77 years old now. As his daughter, what was your response  
16 when he told you that he decided and he wanted to give evidence for this Inquiry?

17 **A.** All of us in our family, we were confused. Our dad is a storyteller and he calls himself a  
18 memories man and he's shared so much with us about growing up in the Islands and  
19 moving to New Zealand. We felt that we knew everything there was to know about our  
20 dad. But we didn't know this. He'd never shared this with us and he'd never even shared it  
21 with my mother. So the initial feeling was one of confusion. But I feel very proud of my  
22 dad for having the courage to speak about what he saw then and to put his voice on the  
23 record to support survivors.

24 **Q.** Thank you. That feeling of silence is so significant for our people. Just in the past few  
25 days we've heard very similar themes and I would like to know why was it important for  
26 him to share what he witnessed now, particularly with the support of his aiga?

27 **A.** Well, it wasn't safe for my father to speak up in 1970. Times were very different then,  
28 corporal punishment was lawful. The abuse that he witnessed wasn't carried out by one bad  
29 egg, it was part of the system and it was his managers that were perpetrating these acts of  
30 violence.

31 The attitudes that led to the racist policies of the Dawn Raids existed in 1970 and  
32 were prevalent. And he was a young immigrant about to get married and start a family. So  
33 there were so many indications that it wasn't safe to speak up then. And at the time my  
34 father exercised the only power that was available to him, and that was to say that I don't



1 want to have any part of this.

2 And then he went on to dedicate his life to empowering children and young people  
3 through education, through his more than 20 year career as a high school teacher, and then  
4 over the course of 25 years he and my mother ran a private training establishment, a second  
5 chance school for education, where thousands of Māori and Pacific students had a second  
6 chance of education.

7 So my dad wanted to put - to break the silence and speak now, because it is safe to speak  
8 now, and also because he wanted to show that he was on the side of the boys then and he's  
9 on their side now.

10 **Q.** Thank you. Finally, if you could please read from your father's statement one last time,  
11 paragraph 64?

12 **A.** "As a final comment, I choose to provide information to the Commission because I know  
13 this will have far-reaching effects and produce results for better services to those in State  
14 care."

15 **Q.** Fa'afetai lava Tupe. As you opened us in prayer, I understand that you would like to end  
16 your session in a particular way?

17 **A.** Yes.

18 **Q.** With the support of your family?

19 **A.** I now invite my brother to give a word of thanks.

20 **PULOTU SELIO:** Fa'afetai lava mo le avanoa. Talofa lava i le mamalu o le ofisa. Avea ia lo'u  
21 leo e fai ma fofoga taumolimoli o le afioga ia Pulotu ma le faletua ia Mareta aemaise foi o  
22 le aiga lea. I le taitai o le Komisi Afioga ia Judge Shaw, aemaise foi le Afioga ia  
23 Ali'imuamua Sandra Alofivae, fa'apea foi le laulau o le ofisa. E momoli atu le fa'afetai ma  
24 le fa'amalo. Malo le tauivi. Malo le tauatai, fa'apea le mamalu o le aufaigaluega o le ofisa  
25 nei. Fa'afetai i lou fa'aaloalo, i le latou fa'amoemoe. Afi atu atu i aiga o ma fanau o loo  
26 fa'atali mai. Alofa le Atua ua taunuu i aiga ma le manuia. Se taimi o i luma tatou toe  
27 feiloai i le soifua laulelei. Fa'afetai i lou alofa. Fa'afetai le fa'aaloalo. Fa'afetai  
28 faamagalalo. Ia fa'amanuia le Atua o le ofisa ma galuega. Fa'afetai. Fa'afetai lou alofa ma  
29 lou agalelei. Soifua ma ia manuia. We're just going to end off with our pese o le aso  
30 fa'amolemole. We're just going to end off with our pese I lenei aso fa'amolemole.

31 **[Ufiufi lo'u agaga song]**

32 **CHAIR:** Pulotu Selio, thank you for your acknowledgment of the Commission and its work and  
33 we are grateful to you and your sister for coming today and presenting this very important  
34 evidence. We deeply admire the courage of your father. We are sorry that he had to hold

1 the silence for so long. But breaking it today is deeply appreciated and very significant and  
 2 an example to I think everybody in the community that where abuse is occurring there  
 3 should not be silence. The only way that we can stop the abuse is through shining a light  
 4 on it. And your father has made an important contribution and you've been very brave in  
 5 bringing his voice to us. And I just wish to address your father as well.

6 Pulotu Arthur, thank you, thank you for presenting your evidence through your  
 7 children and having the courage to do so. And thank you finally to the aiga who's come  
 8 today to support your family, we appreciate your presence as well. Thank you. I think  
 9 we'll take a short adjournment before the next witness.

10 **Adjournment from 10.31 am to 11.09 am**

11 **CHAIR:** Just before we begin, a couple of things. First of all I acknowledge the presence today  
 12 of Dave Mullins and Sister Jane O'Carroll from the Auckland Diocese and Mr Winsley  
 13 from the - hello, welcome. They have come to listen to the evidence of the next witness.

14 The second thing I want to say is that as you will have observed, the next witness  
 15 wants to preserve her privacy and therefore will not be seen by the general public. I'm  
 16 going to ask you please in consideration of her request for privacy that there be no phones  
 17 that take photos or videos or anything else like that. So I'd ask you to respect our next  
 18 witness for that. Thank you. Ms Sharkey.

19 **MS CU**

20 **QUESTIONING BY MS SHARKEY:** Good morning Ms CU.

21 A. Good morning.

22 **Q.** Before we start, are there any opening comments you'd like to make?

23 A. "Tapu moe vunivalu 'o lototatau ko e 'aoniu moe pule fakaleveleva i he fononga  
 24 fakapilikimi 'oku tau fai 'i taimi ki 'itaniti. Tapu mo King Tuheitia mo e kelekele 'eiki 'o e  
 25 Mana Whenua, oku tau Iōnuku mai ai ki heni he 'aho fakakoloa ni. Tapu moe Tangata'i  
 26 fonua moe Fefine'i fonua 'o Aotearoa oku nau talia 'a e feinga moe fekumi 'oku tau fai ki ha  
 27 kaha'u lelei ma'a 'etau fanau tupu. E nga mana, e nga reo, rau rangatira ma, tēnā koutou,  
 28 tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.

29 Tapu mo Hou'eiki mo ha'a Matapule kae 'uma'a e kau Matai, Ali'i moe Matai  
 30 Tulafale 'oku nau talitali 'etau fonotanga. 'Ou te fa'atalofa atu ma le fa'aaloalo 'i lo 'outou  
 31 pa'ia ma lo 'outou mamalu. Tapu kihe ha'a faifekau mo e ha'a Faka'olunga 'o Tonga mo e  
 32 ngafa fatongia 'i he kōsipeli. Tapu mo e kau komisona 'o e Royal Commission Inquiry ko e  
 33 Pacific Investigation kae pehe ki he kau tataki ngāue ki he va'a fakatotolo ma'ae kakai  
 34 Pasifiki.