

SENATE INQUIRY INTO THALIDOMIDE USE IN AUSTRALIA

Submission by [REDACTED], mother of [REDACTED], Thalidomide Survivor.

Terms Of Reference:

I wish to address the role of the Australian Government in compensation and support.

Summary:

- In the early days we coped by living out of town.
- [REDACTED] ended up being bullied mercilessly.
- [REDACTED] tried so hard to get on with his life.
- My enduring guilt and sorrow.
- Before I'm gone I want [REDACTED] to have compensation and support from the Australian Government.

Over the years I didn't know how I would cope. But I knew I had to as I had two daughters to look after as well. I felt very much by myself, anxious, alone, isolated. I felt lucky to live out of town away from prying eyes. People were sticky beaks, always staring, pointing. This upset me very much.

Because [REDACTED] went to a small country school at Springside there were few pupils and they didn't bully or anything but when [REDACTED] went into town to school it was full on. [REDACTED] was always having to cope with bullying and he just had to get used to it. At high school he was bullied so much, I was very grateful he had good friends. They were very good friends and I think they helped him survive, otherwise God knows.

When [REDACTED] came home from school he was able to get away from it because we lived out of town and I think we were lucky he could get away. Living out of town could be isolated and lonely but it was good, it was relief from people staring.

At the end of school and after, [REDACTED] wanted to have a girlfriend like his friends but no girls wanted to look at him or go with him or go on dates. He was lucky his good friends stayed with him. He had no girlfriend just his friends and their girlfriends.

After school he just tried to get on with working and he got jobs in gardening and coped as best he could and tried to better himself with landscaping. He tried his best to stay on track and tried to study horticulture at Wagga but was lonely and starting drinking but then pulled himself out of that and stopped drinking and smoking. He must have had a strong character. He kept trying.

He was lucky to have caring sisters who cared for him and who were company for him, being out of town. He was lucky to have nice cousins and uncles and aunties who were nice to him.

It's always been with me. It's never left me no matter what they did, it's always upsetting. It's always with me to think I couldn't do anything about it. Except for his operation when he was four. They did a skin graft on his ear, the lower part was missing, they took part of my ear and gave a skin graft which turned out well as he had to wear glasses and it would have been difficult to wear glasses without his ear.

It has always made me feel sad and given me a sad look. People may think I look sour but it's just sad, I always have a look of sorrow. There is nothing to say except I feel sad and sorry.

██████ met ██████ through the internet and he got his life back in line and is married with two boys. Having the boys has been his happiest time. He is more worried about looking after them than he is about himself. He is worried he won't be able to look after them as they get older. He worries he won't be around when they're older.

Because of nerve damage he is getting weaker and his body gets very tired. He is only 56 but he is like a 75 year old because of his nerve damage and weakness, he shouldn't be so tired. His hearing loss and nerve damage will never get better, it will continue to deteriorate and get worse. His ill health has really caught up with him, the headaches and damage to the nervous system.

I worry about him not being able to live as long as his boys need him and not being able to care for them. Just when they need him he may not be around. This concerns me for them and I'm just so sad for him too. The only thing he wants is to be happy with them and doing it right. He would do anything for his boys.

We're the innocent ones who have felt guilty for so long. The responsible ones have wanted to wash their hands of us. The survivors can't do it on their own anymore. I worry that I won't be around to try to help ██████ I am asking the Australian Government, who didn't protect them, to provide the necessary compensation and support.