

A Cautionary Tale – the executive summary

In her paper ‘A Cautionary Tale’ Louise Greentree ¹writes about how a young woman we will call Harriet, longing for love and sexual experience caused a Christian family to be abused and ‘excommunicated’ from an Anglican parish church in Sydney Diocese, and launched against the husband of the family unfounded allegations of child abuse and sexually predatory behaviour against a ‘vulnerable adult’.

Who is Harriet? She is now aged 21 and she has -

- **Difficult relationships:** very conflicted relationships with her family since childhood and she now lives away from home in a flat arranged by the parish, and receiving a pension.
- **Poor health:** She has had severe and debilitating eating difficulties since childhood, including both anorexia and binge eating. She suffers from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), including ruminations: compulsively turning over in her mind disturbing thoughts, including inappropriate sexual or blasphemous thoughts, based on delusions.
- **An attachment to the members of the A family:** At age 14 Harriet attached herself limpet-like to a loving, rambunctious Christian family, Mr. and Mrs. A, four daughters and two sons. She was often at the house uninvited, staying for meals and overnight, ringing the family to collect her and drive her to church, drive her to their home and drive her to her home if she didn’t stay over. These kindly Christian people allowed this. Harriet was a friend of their eldest daughter; they felt sorry for her and they drew her into this loving family atmosphere along with all the children’s friends as well as home stay students and other visitors who were in and out of the house. She was just another mouth to feed or another bed to provide.
- **An obsessive infatuation with Mr. A:** no-one realized she was nurturing a crush on Mr. A from age 14 which developed into the full-blown fantasy of love. This adolescent fantasy never matured, but became increasingly obsessive and confused because of sexual longings. The infatuation/love was never suspected let alone returned.

She was a time bomb waiting to explode, which it did when she was 20 years old, in November-December 2006. Two things triggered the explosion:

1. In defiance of the rule of the household that no girls were allowed into boys’ bedrooms and vice versa, she went into one of the son’s bedroom, fell asleep on his bed and stayed there overnight. It is agreed that nothing else occurred.
2. Shortly after this incident, she tried to act seductively towards Mr. A, in a most inept and inappropriate manner and she was rejected with unintentional brutality.

This led to a number of consequences:

1. **Mrs. A started trying to get help to detach Harriet from the family** after the incident where Harriet slept on the son’s bed overnight.

¹ Louise Greentree BA LLB LLM(Hons) ProfCertArb. Readers are invited to read the full article and other articles on the Discipline procedures of the Anglican Church in Australia which can be found on Louise’s website: www.anglicanfuture.org/louise and she can be contacted on louise@greentreeaustralis.com The information in this paper is taken from the voluminous statutory declarations, signed statements and supporting documents contained in the diocesan investigator’s report.

2. **Harriet tried to make sense of the situation, without success.** She had constructed a fantasy about a supposed special or 'weird chemistry' between herself and Mr. A. She examined every contact between them to see whether it had a sexual element to it which would justify her feeling sexual desire, and she attributes sexually-charged motives to all kinds of innocent behaviour in that family which is, as she herself says, very physically demonstrative, hugging each other, friends and visitors, and holding hands and saying how they love each other. She has never had sexual relationships (according to her doctor), her relationship with her mother (who also has OCD) is bad, and she is dangerously naïve. She felt very guilty about her feelings which she did not understand.
3. **Harriet was told she was the victim** and therefore absolved from her guilt feelings.
4. **Harriet was manipulated by other people** in the parish, including the rector's wife, who pursued other agendas against Mr. A. The case was irrevocably labeled as one of child abuse and grooming (for a hug when she was 16) and sexually predatory behaviour when she was aged 20, although her own writings indicate 'consent' to the actions she fantasised about; she was characterised as a 'vulnerable' person.
5. **Mr. and Mrs. A were kept in the dark:** they had no idea about Harriet's infatuation for Mr. A, (they were misled into thinking she was developing a longing for one of the A sons about her own age) and none of those who did know made any contact with them to suggest that private steps be taken to sort it out without embarrassing or hurting Harriet. There was only a friend LW, whose good suggestion on 17/12/06 that they tell Mrs. A the story was not acted upon.
6. **Mr. A was condemned as guilty when he got upset and denied** any inappropriate behaviour. Members of the parish and diocesan leadership and the investigator all of said this meant that he was guilty! This behaviour is similar to that of the witchcraft trials of Salem where only those women who protested their innocence were hanged.
7. **As the 'evidence' was rather thin as at December 2006 more 'evidence' was sought rather than making an attempt to resolve the problem:** Harriet continued going to the A family home and she behaved as before, only it seems she was more alert to seeking opportunities to be at the house when Mr. A was there, preferably alone. By now Harriet was in a state of full blown sexual desire for Mr. A. and Mr. A still had no idea of this.
8. **January 2007:** Harriet's opportunities to be with Mr. A. alone were few. There is only one allegation about a time when they were alone in the house, and it is that he hugged her and rubbed a hand up and down her spine - surely a lost opportunity for far more sexually-charged conduct had Mr. A really been wooing Harriet as she so fervently desired. All other incidents in this month were in public places in front of people, such as on another evening she alleges he kissed her on the back of the neck (this is as sexy as it gets!) in view of two of his daughters sitting in the car! Both allegations are denied. Apart from these there is only one other day in January when she says an incident occurred, discussed below.
9. **Harriet made many complaints not accepted by the diocesan investigator:** as examples of how hard Harriet tried to imbue sexually-charged motivation to Mr. A it is revealing to look at the other complaints she made which even the investigator rejected: Mr. A was accused of -

- a. Hugging her at the age of 14 when she was crying convulsively in the family kitchen, having burnt her hand on a saucepan. A son came into the kitchen at the time.
 - b. Giving her a compliment at age 19: he said 'You look good in that' when he saw her wearing a skirt belonging to one of his daughters.
 - c. Taking her hand to help her into a car at age 20.
 - d. Touching her hand as she stumbled and fell against the side of the family vehicle at age 20.
 - e. Blowing her a kiss when she was on the telephone at age 20: Mr. A was actually blowing a kiss to a daughter who was out of Harriet's sight.
 - f. Giving her a hug and blowing her a kiss at age 20.
 - g. Giving her a hug and a compliment 'You're looking good' at church at age 20.
10. **The few complaints that will be referred to the Professional Standards Committee** are set out in the schedule at the end.
11. **The major defense that applies to the whole case** is this:
- a. Harriet was drawn into the loving, hugging, hand-holding and caring Christian family life because they were sorry for her as a pitiable and neglected 14-year-old friend of one of the daughters.
 - b. Her mother made the accusations which she wanted to be kept anonymous and for Harriet herself not to know to be told about) based on Harriet's obsessive infatuation with Mr. A of which no-one in the A family was aware until mid-February 2007, exaggerating and multiplying the complaints. She said that Harriet herself was 'in love' with Mr. A and he and the whole family were very important to her.
 - c. No-one of those who knew about Harriet's obsessive infatuation did anything to apply sensible and compassionate measures to save everyone, Harriet included, from the results of it. They set her up as 'bait' to try to get more 'evidence' before alerting Mr. A and his family to what was happening. Harriet was coached to continue her contact with the family and to try to make opportunities for something which her advisers could interpret as being sexually predatory behaviour.

What some people say about Harriet:

Mrs. P the wife of a retired senior clergyman: after being introduced to Harriet by Mrs. A in November 2006, Harriet and she sat down at a table and '*before long we were in a very deep theological discussion. (Harriet) said that she thought that she had committed the unpardonable sin. She was talking about blaspheming against the Holy Spirit of God. Within minutes of meeting her she drops this on me. I was trying to read the situation. What's going on here? ... We talked for about half an hour.*' (Note: this is typical of ruminative OCD: inappropriate blasphemous thoughts and inappropriate sexual thoughts.)

Mrs. P says: '*In summary, I only met (Harriet) once, for maybe half an hour, in the foyer of the church. I gained the impression that she was very troubled. There was I, a stranger, and she's talking to me about deep theological issues and about her sickness and the fact that she hasn't been well. ... I wouldn't say that (Harriet) came across as vulnerable. I thought (she) was mixed up.*'

Harriet's most recent medical adviser Dr. R: talking about Harriet's own responses –

'(Harriet) told me she felt close to this gentleman. I think she was probably attracted to him.'

'(Harriet) told me she had a crush on (Mr. A.). She felt infatuated with him, even felt sexually attracted to him'

'There is some possibility that (Harriet's) recollections of the alleged behaviour are unreliable because of her medical condition.'

'(Harriet) has known (Mr. A) since she was fourteen and he's an affectionate open sort of person apparently. He may well have put his arms around her. He may well have hugged her. He may well have given her some affection when she was distressed or whatever. Her perception of that may be delusional...'

'Her perception towards this gentleman is one of infatuation. I'm sure she did have some sexual feelings towards him, because he was a male showing her attention'

'The extent to which it (the alleged behaviour) happened and what she perceived it was and what he was actually doing, I can't be sure.....'

'I think it is her mother who probably pushed this (the diocesan investigation). I got the impressions that (Harriet) would like it to go away.'

Finally, as Dr. R says: ... *'It's just unfortunate that it's come to this point where it's being looked at in a formal legal way, as opposed to being dealt with in a counseling session.'*

The diocesan process has exacerbated the situation

1. **The PSU has no jurisdiction:** As Mr. A is neither clergy, nor employed by the parish or diocese nor a volunteer in 'a position of leadership in the diocese' and therefore the church legislation cannot on any intelligent assessment apply to him.
2. **The initiation of the complaint process was always flawed:** Harriet is 20, and capable of making the complaint herself. She did not do so because she loves the whole of the A family and she had a delusional passion for Mr. A.
3. **Harriet is designated a 'vulnerable person':** a term **not** contained in the legislation, it has been created to try to get over the problem of consent by an adult person. Harriet herself and Mrs. P both reject that description and call her 'mixed up'. Harriet lives alone, she receives a pension, has a bank account, is registered to vote, goes shopping for food and clothes, appears in public appropriately dressed and presentable; she is a student at TAFE, having the educational qualifications to meet the entry requirements.
4. **At age 20 Harriet rapturously consented to** (as appears from her writings), and even initiated the behaviour she has inflated by her delusions into examples of Mr. A returning her passion for him.
5. **The PSU has entertained unrelated accusations,** prompted by the separate agenda of the rector's wife, in the form of a signed statement from one woman who was, in the 1990's a student in Mr. A's university class, and the notes of two anonymous telephone calls to the rector's wife, all supposed to 'prove' that Mr. A has a history of sexual abuse of adult young women in his workplace. The statements and notes say no such thing. Details of these complaints were kept hidden by the parish leadership, the PSU and the investigator from Mr. A

until January 2008 after the rector and his wife had left the parish. Mr. A's university personnel file indicates that there were no such complaints.

6. Schedule of complaints

The end result is that the following are those of Harriet's diffuse allegations that will be referred to the Professional Standards Committee, and thence to a Tribunal hearing²:

1. In 2003 on an unidentifiable date: a lengthy 'sideways' hug while Harriet is seated on a lounge and Mr. A is seated on an adjacent lounge chair (or on the arm of the lounge – Harriet cannot remember which), and breathing on her ear. This is **defended**: the incident is denied as described; it would be physically difficult if not impossible without risking grave damage to one's back, and the variations in Harriet's several accounts indicate coaching and are therefore unreliable, in addition to the intrinsic unreliability of her recollection due to her medical condition (per Dr. R).
2. In 2006: in February 2006 (according to her mother) or in November 2006 (according to Harriet) or on 3 December 2006 (according to Harriet's email to SD): when Harriet entered unexpectedly into Mr. A's study, going through two rooms, one of which was the master bedroom, to find Mr. A alone there working in the dark on his computer, she stood beside him; he put an arm around her waist and she placed one hand over his on her waist and the other on his hair. He then looked up and saw it was her, not his daughter, got up and ran from the room. Later in the evening, she alleges Mr. A sat on a lounge and she in an armchair and he massaged her hand, with others including Mrs. A and daughters in the room. **Defended**: (a) Mr. A thought it was his daughter until she touched his hair and put her hand on his on her waist; (b) there are three versions by Harriet and another two by her mother; all but Harriet's first version have clearly been manufactured by her mother and/or by the parish officer 'Gwen'. (c) The mother's last version, even more grotesque, is specifically denied by her daughter, and (d) the hand massaging is denied: it is so unlikely after the abrupt rejection of her rather inept advances in the study.
3. In January 2007: all of Harriet's allegations in January show evidence of coaching. There are parish people who now have a vested interest in getting Harriet to find further evidence. Harriet is still in the full flush of her obsessive love and sexual desire for Mr. A. There is also the intrinsic unreliability of Harriet's recollection due to her medical condition (per Dr. R).
 - a. January unidentified date: giving Harriet a kiss on the neck while walking her up the driveway of her home, in front of two of Mr. A's daughters sitting in the car. **Denied**.
 - b. 22 January: a long hard hug and rubbing her back. **Denied**.
 - c. 28 January: after Harriet wrote 2 letters, one to Mrs. A apologising for staying in a son's room overnight the previous November and a strange one to Mr. A³, she wanted to discuss her letter

² This is the only possible result as so much is disputed, unless the Committee recommended that no further action be taken, which is the only feasible alternative. It would be futile for the Committee to try to exercise its' supposed 'powers' to impose orders for payment of compensation, or for attendance at conciliation or for an apology – none of which have any force and effect for a voluntary member of the church.

³ She kept a copy. Mr. A threw his original out after Mrs. A had read it. It said: *'Can I talk to you about something important? (These words are partly crossed out) I've been a bit confused about the way I've been relating to you lately. I'm not sure if its just me, that I've misconstrued everything, but I'm feeling that the way I've been relating to you at times has been inappropriate. I feel as if I haven't utilized appropriate boundaries & I wanted to apologise to*

as he was setting up his coffee machine in the church foyer. From this arose a cluster of allegations from that one period of time amounting to probably less than an hour in full view of parishioners and for a time of Harriet's mother –

** Making a joke about Harriet's letter.* Agreed. Neither he nor his wife knew what Harriet was talking about. No sexual content.

**Saying 'I'm sorry' to Harriet.* Not recalled. No sexual content.

**Saying, in what Harriet says is a nonsexual and non-romantic fashion that he loves her, she is a great lady.* Possible – the whole family used to tell her they love her. It is part of their language of encouragement. No sexual intent, which is acknowledged by Harriet.

Kissing her twice on the neck.* **Denied: it was in a public place with people around.

**Touching her (briefly) on the waist, hip and back* as Mr. A served coffee to parishioners. Agreed as possible in order to indicate that she was in the way and should move. No sexual intent. His second eldest son was with them behind the espresso coffee machine. Versions given by her mother (who did not see anything improper at the time) and a later version by her must be regarded as the result of coaching.

**Putting his hand over hers* to guide it onto one of the levers on the espresso machine while showing her how to make coffee, on her insistence. Agreed as possible, has done so to others when teaching them how to use the machine. No sexual intent.

This is the totality of the allegations by Harriet that have to be tested by a Tribunal hearing.

The allegation at age 16 is farcical. None of the other allegations over 4 separate days when Harriet was aged 20 constitute sexual abuse of an adult within the terms of the Code of Conduct 'Faithfulness in Service' nor the Discipline Ordinance 2006.

Harriet is not a 'vulnerable adult': this is a term **not** contained in either of those documents under which the complaint is made. Harriet, although dealing with health problems does not have impaired mental capacity therefore she is not a person under a legal incapacity as defined in the Ordinance.

The determination of the parish leadership and others to conflate Harriet's deluded fantasy of a pathetic little 'romance' into allegations of sexually predatory behaviour is a scandalous element of the case.

The fact that the legislation allows a person to be 'convicted' not only on the facts of the actual complaint, but also on the facts of another complaint, especially an anonymous one, which has no connection with the church, parish or diocese, is one of the appalling injustices perpetrated by this church legislation.

Harriet is manipulative and, sadly, her hopes of not damaging the relationship with the A family that she expresses so movingly in her letter have been destroyed completely on the instigation of her mother. She is a victim not of Mr. A but of her mother and members of the parish leadership and others with agendas of their own that have nothing to do with Harriet's welfare.

Readers are invited to read the full discussion of this case in the paper 'A Cautionary Tale' on the website www.anglicanfuture.org/louise and to reflect how it might happen to them or a member of their family or circle of friends, given the present state of the diocesan legislation and process.

you if my actions in anyway have caused this. You, (your wife), & your children are really important to me & I love you all dearly & value the friendship I have with you very much and I wouldn't want to damage that in anyway.'