

# The Pell legacy III: the power and flaws in memories of things past

Disputed allegations of clerical abuse reveal how fraught the issue can be.

In 2015, as Witness J spoke for the first time to Victorian detectives about George Pell, a woman in Queensland was preparing to make allegations against two priests, with extraordinary claims dating back more than 50 years to the 1960s when she was five.

Pam Williams, an Indigenous woman who had taken the name Tjanara Goreng Goreng, was moved to act because of reports she'd been hearing from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse.

She had spent close to 20 years in and out of psychotherapy with a Brisbane psychiatrist, Dr Warwick Middleton. She would later publicly thank him for "showing me the way to recovery and the way to manage putting priests in jail".

Goreng Goreng had been sexually abused while at high school by a priest, Leo Wright, who was later jailed for offences against her and other girls. Her family agrees that this occurred. But they reject every one of her allegations against two other priests which then emerged from her therapy. Her allegations, the family says, are "delusional fantasy and make believe".

Goreng Goreng says the treatment with Middleton started in 1997 and continued for "seven years of weekly psychotherapy sessions".

Middleton has been a leading advocate in Australia of dissociative identity disorder, the psychiatric theory that people cope with severe trauma, typically from childhood, by dissociating into different identities. It was once known as multiple personality disorder before it was discredited in a series of high-profile court cases in the United States and Australia.

"When I first attended his office I undertook some tests, which confirmed what I had known: that I had a high level of dissociation," Goreng Goreng later wrote, reflecting on how it all started. She felt that in Middleton she had found a professional she could trust completely.

She wrote of “falling in love with him, in a healthy textbook case of transference” — where a patient “redirects unconscious feelings, desires and expectations”.

Goreng Goreng told Middleton that her late grandfather had been with her for every one of their sessions. “Dr Middleton asked me if he could speak directly to my grandfather. I checked this out with my grandfather and so they began their conversation. Dr Middleton asked questions, I conveyed these to my grandfather, and would report back his answers. Dr Middleton said later that he believed it was my grandfather, as I could not have answered those questions.”

By 2012 Goreng Goreng believed she had worked through her issues and made the first of a series of allegations against two priests, in a paper on healing which she wrote for an academic journal. She claimed that a Catholic priest began to sexually abuse her when she was five, living in the small Queensland town of Longreach.

This lasted until the age of 12 when she went to boarding school. From then, she claimed, she was subjected to sexual abuse “by white male adults” as well as “ritualistic abuse by adults in Longreach who included members of the Catholic Church”. Others included the local swimming coach.

“I had begun drinking altar wine when I was about seven years old as the priest who abused me gave it to me,” she alleged.

Goreng Goreng had considered she was well enough to halt her sessions with Middleton, but publicity from the royal commission sent her again into a spiral. After meeting with the commission she admitted herself to hospital.

“I needed intensive therapy,” she wrote. “[I] stayed in Middleton’s clinic where I could see him for three hours a week.” The purpose, she wrote, was “to fill in the gaps and explore precisely what transpired when I was six, seven ... 11. The abuse had happened intermittently during primary school and then through high school, by different priests.”

After a second three-week stay in Middleton’s specialised trauma unit in Belmont Private Hospital where she “drew a lot, talked a lot, remembered many things”, Middleton told Goreng Goreng: “You’ve got enough information to charge him if you want to.”

Goreng Goreng’s allegations, as published in her 2018 biography *Long Way from No Go*, now included that a Rockhampton priest, Father Grove Johnson, raped her over

several years from the age of five or six. She alleged that her father would drop her off at the presbytery in Longreach where another priest, Michael Hayes, would give her lemonade and then lead her into another room to be with Johnson.

She claims Johnson held up a fob watch which he began swinging back and forth — “just watch the watch swinging”, she remembers the priest saying, “in a sing-song voice”. Goreng Goreng recalled that she lost awareness of what was going on. “My dress was pulled up around my waist,” she wrote, “he was lying on top of me.” Goreng Goreng recalls feeling “sore between my legs” and that afterwards her father would take by the hand and lead her home, saying nothing of what had occurred.

Goreng Goreng wrote that Johnson’s abuse came “without real preamble, without grooming — each time a brutal non sequitur”.

The allegations are horrific. They are also completely fabricated, says Goreng Goreng’s family, who have campaigned hard to set the record straight and have [established a website](#) debunking the sensational claims.

Her brother Kevin Williams, chair of the research ethics committee of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and a former legal academic at Newcastle University, speaks for the family: “We don’t expect anything from Pam. We know it is all concocted fantasy, lies and delusion by our sister who has suffered from serious mental problems all her life and is prone to make believe and fantasy, much like her fictitious Aboriginal name Tjanara Goreng Goreng.”

The family has launched a line-by-line rebuttal of Goreng Goreng’s claims. They acknowledge the abuse she suffered at the hands of Leo Wright “has caused long-term trauma”. But they say that’s no reason “fictitiously to damn others who are innocent and deceased”.

“My father certainly didn’t go near any presbytery,” said Kevin Williams. “In fact my father had no interest in religion and the only time he set foot in a church was for funerals and weddings.

“Our family has tolerated Pam’s lies over the years but now she has put our deceased father in the public domain as someone who allowed priests to molest her. That is totally out of order and it’s time to take and stand and expose her for the fraud she is.”

Hayes was dead before Goreng Goreng made her allegations. Johnson died shortly after police interviewed him and had decided to discontinue the case in 2016.

On the eve of a newspaper publishing extracts from her book, Goreng Goreng changed at least one key detail of her story. After police concluded Johnson had never been to

Longreach, Goreng Goreng alleged the crimes had been committed in the Rockhampton presbytery.

*Inq* has also discovered that Goreng Goreng's account of a priest using a fob watch to hypnotise her before raping her bears a remarkable resemblance to an account given to the royal commission by another woman three years before Goreng Goreng's book was published.

A former ward of the Neerkol Orphanage alleged that a "Father John" had pulled out of his trouser pocket a silver fob watch and waved it side to side in front of her face.

"He made me say 'I'm tired,' 'I'm sleepy,' " she alleged.

The account also referred to "gold crosses on his lapels", as did Goreng Goreng's.

"He ... proceeded to lift my dress right up, remove my underpants and spread my legs apart," she stated. "Father John got on top of me ... It began to hurt me ... "

Police have never found "Father John".

But what of Middleton, who Goreng Goreng has thanked for "showing me the way ... to manage putting priests in jail".

Middleton told *Inq* he hadn't read Goreng Goreng's book and had no role in the writing of it. He said it was "not ethically appropriate" to divulge details of a therapy in a way that publicly identified a patient and breached their confidentiality.

"Speaking quite generally," he said, "even if there were no confidentiality issues, it is a very considerable stretch to ask anyone about their memories of an unrecorded conversation that happened two decades ago, unless there was something about the conversation that would have made it memorable."

Middleton is the leading figure in a tight-knit group of psychiatrists, academics and counsellors who have become increasingly influential in shaping the public's understanding of historic child sex abuse.

He's a veteran of the so-called memory wars which raged in the '80s and '90s when a series of sensational cases came to court based on "repressed" memories of childhood sex abuse which had been "recovered" in therapy. Apart from the risk that the therapist could have implanted a false memory, the recovered memories of abuse could rarely be proven. Whether or not they occurred became, essentially, a matter of belief.

Middleton is a former president of the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation, a US-based organisation which has since its inception included practitioners of diagnostic approaches such as multiple personality disorder (which also relies on the existence of repressed memories) and a belief in the existence of satanic ritual abuse and CIA mind control.

Prominent society figures in the US have been accused by former patients of implanting false memories, including of satanic ritual abuse. This is not the case with Middleton.

In Australia, Middleton is backed by the Dr Cathy Kezelman, whose Blue Knot Foundation has become a leading national voice for adult survivors of child sex abuse.

Kezelman has a personal story of surviving child sex abuse detailed in a book she self-published in 2010 called *Innocence Revisited: a Tale in Parts*.

The book relates how Kezelman slipped from a life of steady success to black despair after the death of a young niece. In echoes of the Goreng Goreng story, Kezelman turned to therapy. "Before long I was attending 2 x 50 minute sessions a week with my very own psychotherapist," she records, and was diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder.

She fragmented into several entities, including Growly, "a part of me which had perpetrated despicable acts", who she found "smelly and yucky".

Under therapy Kezelman remembered horrific instances of abuse from a young age.

She had been driven by her father to her grandmother's house where she remembered ritual abuse ceremonies involving adults wearing hoods. She recalled witnessing another little girl being sacrificed and dismembered on an altar.

She alleged that her late father had repeatedly raped her, including at gunpoint, from a young age. The family doctor too had violently sexually assaulted her as a young girl, night after night.

Kezelman says some of her memories may be distorted but that the core of them is true.

"It's not about the absolute detail of my story, whether I was wearing a blue dress or what day it was" she told *Inq*. "It's about all adding up to something — the substance of it and the feeling, adding up to an experience."

“Traumatic memory is quite complex. It is quite fragmented. What’s important to know is there are studies which show that memory recovered is as accurate as that which was never forgotten.”

As in the case of Goreng Goreng, Kezelman’s brother, Claude Imhoff, who is also a doctor, has outright denied that any of the events took place. Her claims have also split her family.

Despite this Kezelman has gone from strength to strength on a narrative of survival. She has also been awarded an Order of Australia.