

Commission slams police, authorities in abuse inquiry

But after \$50-million and almost five years, no answer on Cornwall pedophile ring

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KIRK MAKIN

JUSTICE REPORTER

A \$50-million probe into rampant sexual abuse in Cornwall, Ont., ended yesterday without answering the key question it had faced - whether a sophisticated pedophile ring evaded the law for years while its influential members were preying on local children.

Nonetheless, the Glaude commission's 2,400-page report exposed a seamy nest of sexual depravity that was either ignored or incompetently investigated by police and social-welfare authorities.

Commissioner G. Normand Glaude, a judge with the Ontario Court, depicted a frightened community that split apart as rumours spread of local dignitaries and church officials arranging clandestine meetings where they molested children.

Reporting after almost five years of intensive inquiries - bankrolled by an increasingly restless Ontario government - Judge Glaude concluded that, while Cornwall was a haven of sex abuse, many of the more colourful accounts were either fanciful or fictitious.

"Throughout this inquiry I have heard evidence that suggested that there were cases of joint abuse, passing of alleged victims, and possibly, passive knowledge of abuse," Judge Glaude said. "I want to be very clear that I am not going to make a pronouncement on whether a ring existed or not."

His report identified a slew of culprits - from mischievous Internet webmasters to local MPP Gary Guzzo, whose dire warnings of cultist activities rang through the provincial legislature and helped engender an image of a crime-ridden town.

Judge Glaude traced the very notion of a pedophile "clan" back to disingenuous communiqués from police, combined with "careless, even reckless" statements from Mr. Guzzo.

"His criticisms of the [Ontario Provincial Police's] Project Truth investigation were sometimes based on incomplete and inaccurate information, and had a profound impact on the investigation's effectiveness."

The report also slammed a rogue police officer - former Cornwall Police officer Perry Dunlop - who became a local folk hero after he lost faith in the police establishment and embarked on a vigilante mission to expose alleged abusers.

Judge Glaude said that Mr. Dunlop's sleuthing was marred by bad documentation and interview techniques that improperly influenced victims and tainted the evidence he collected. In combination with the general bungling of Project Truth investigators, his bungling likely caused many pedophiles to escape detection or continue harming their victims, the commissioner said.

Mr. Dunlop was jailed six months for contempt of court after he quit the force, moved to B.C. and refused to testify at the inquiry, on the basis that he had lost confidence in the justice system.

The inquiry heard from 175 witnesses over almost five years, 30 of whom claimed to have been assaulted.