

An open letter to my victims and to the people of Victoria,

I offer my sincerest apologies to my victims and to all Victorians but given the enormity of my crimes that apology doesn't amount to much. I wrote these lines in a letter to the editor of the 'Sunday Herald Sun' in 2009. I posed the question, 'What else can I do?' No-one has answered that question.

For many years it was alleged that I had never shown any remorse for my crimes. After evidence of when I had shown remorse was posted on the Internet the claim became that I had never shown any 'genuine' remorse. I wept during my initial police interviews and this is recorded on audio tapes never released by Victoria Police. I also wept for my victims during my committal hearing in 1988 and that is on the public record.

In 2005 I wrote a letter of apology to one of my victims, Con Vitkos, and I asked a member of Prison Fellowship to deliver it. My letter was seized by prison management and I was thrown into a bare solitary confinement cell for my trouble. I then got charged with two prison offences.

Two years later I won a Supreme Court case over the right to send my letter of apology to Mr Vitkos. Corrections Victoria told the public I was planning to write to all my victims, not just Mr Vitkos, and the Victorian State Government introduced retrospective legislation making it a crime for a prisoner to write to his victims.

Corrections Victoria was not concerned about my victims; Corrections Victoria was concerned about Corrections Victoria. They did not inform Mr Vitkos that I had attempted to write to him and to him alone. Instead they deliberately created the false impression that I was attempting to write to all of my victims. They did this to ensure that there was no public criticism of their actions. They also feared that Mr Vitkos might actually want to receive my letter!

I chose to write to Mr Vitkos, and to him alone, because I thought I might be able to answer some questions he had raised publicly. I doubt whether many, if any, of my other victims would be interested in receiving a letter from me. As such, I never intended to write to all of my victims.

The Hoddle Street shootings were despicable, cowardly and senseless. I am the first to say so because I committed them. They were not, however, committed in anger as a 'war on society.' They were committed in a dream-like state, a war fantasy of my own making because my dream of being a real war hero were dashed when I was forced out of Duntroon. My crimes were also heartless because I gunned down innocent people going about their daily lives as if I was conducting target practice on an army rifle range.

Thirty years have passed since the Hoddle Street shootings and I am far from being the immature, disturbed, desperate teenager who committed them. I underwent psychiatric and psychological testing in 2012 and I was assessed as being a low risk of re-offending in any way. Convicted killers rated as posing a real risk of re-offending have been, and continue to be, granted parole in Victoria and elsewhere. Corrections Victoria has stood on my neck for 30 years not because I pose a risk to the prison, but because they believe I (and a select few others) deserve to be subjected to additional punishment.

The Victorian State Government changed the law to keep me in prison not because I pose a risk to the community, but because they believe I did not deserve to be given a minimum non-parole term. The fact is a minimum term was not opposed by the prosecution and the minimum term that was set was not appealed against. They didn't think I would survive to see the end of my 27-year minimum term and when I did they brought into law retrospective legislation that re-wrote history to suit their views as to what they thought my sentence should have been.

If I had been granted parole in 2014 I would have very quickly faded into obscurity and I would have ended my days leading a quiet, simple life devoted to community service. Instead, the future holds nothing but endless legal battles. I didn't want this. If the blame lies anywhere, it lies with Corrections Victoria and successive Victorian State Governments. If they never intended to release me, they should have made this plain 30 years ago.

John Knight