

## Ex-Brethren: I Caused Splits

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A FORMER **Exclusive Brethren** member has admitted being actively involved in splitting families.

Ron Fawkes, a senior Brethren member for 40 years, said yesterday he played a big part in instigating the separation of children from parents who had left the sect.

He said that as a senior member he was responsible for dealing with lawyers in cases where legal action was taken to recover children. He also spent a lot of time in court fighting to keep children in the sect.

"When the Brethren claim that they do not split families, it is not true," he said. "I was instrumental in breaking up families.

"One time I spent six weeks in court trying to keep children away from their parents who were out (of the sect)."

Mr Fawkes, 55, said that at the time, he did not have a conscience about what he was doing, because he was told not to think about it.

"We were told that it was a sin to think," he said. It was not until Mr Fawkes was punished for "daring to question the cult world leader" that he came to understand the devastation caused by his actions.

He was excluded from the Church but his wife and six children, with other family members including his brother, Phillip, remained with the sect.

And Mr Fawkes claims that all were banned from having contact with him.

At that time, his youngest child was 2 1/2 .

"It was a shocking, shocking time," he said. "There were times when I would have preferred death."

But Mr Fawkes said he had been desperate to be readmitted to the Church.

And he hoped his relationship with his wife, which he perceived to be a strong one, would weather the strains.

"We had a very close relationship in every way," he said. "I went year after year living like a hermit and waiting for them to readmit me."

He spent time pondering the beliefs instilled in him by the Brethren from a young age.

"Thankfully I reached a point where I realised that something was seriously wrong with the Brethren and I decided I didn't want to go back," he said.

He was divorced and, despite paying child maintenance regularly, has not seen his children for more than 14 years.

"Every day I ache for my children," he said. "I do not even know what the youngest ones look like."

Mr Fawkes said he had been told three of his children had been married and had children.

"I have a lot of grief and pain and in some ways, most of me is still with the Brethren," he said.

Mr Fawkes said he had been told three of his children had been married and had children of their own.

"People leave the Brethren and they come out and tell you things," he said. "I have a lot of grief and a lot of pain and in some ways, most of me is still with the Brethren."

Mr Fawkes, who is remarried, has moved to Sydney. He said his new wife had been a big help in getting his life back on track.

"I am very, very grateful to her because she is very understanding," he said.

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