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The Boston Globe

June 11, 2001, Monday ,THIRD EDITION

## EX-PUPILS SEEK PAYBACK FOR ABUSE AT DEAF SCHOOL

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**SECTION:** METRO/REGION; Pg. B1

**LENGTH:** 1086 words

PORTLAND, Maine - Peter Martineau said that when he was 5 years old and wet his bed, a dorm mother dragged him down the hallway by his hair to the bathroom. When the deaf child roared in wordless fury, she shoved his head in a sink and jammed a bar of soap in his mouth. Then she stripped him naked and forced him to sit on the toilet for hours.

That, Martineau said, was the beginning of 13 years of abuse at the state-run Governor Baxter School for the Deaf, on Maine's Mackworth Island, near Portland. During the late 1950s and the '60s, when Martineau was a student there, he said, the island was a playground for staff members who took advantage of the isolation to abuse the deaf children.

The terror ran so deep that when the state attorney general's office investigated the school in 1982, some former students said they didn't tell of the full extent of the horrors they endured.

Three years ago, Martineau was one of the first to demand the state take responsibility for what had happened. Denied the ability to sue, he helped form a survivors' support group, A Safer Place of Portland, to prod the state to take action.

Now 40 years after the alleged abuse began, and after countless setbacks, the group is growing in solidarity. It has the support of the governor and the Maine Legislature, which is expected to set aside \$5 million to compensate victims and to apologize to each one.

"I have been waiting for all these years, and nothing has happened," said Martineau, 46, speaking through an interpreter. "Finally, finally, after all this neglect, they are doing something."

Reports of physical and sexual abuse at the school became public in 1982 when the state launched its investigation. A report issued by the attorney general's office accused the school's principal, Robert Kelly, of abusing students physically and sexually, and the school's superintendent, Joseph Youngs, of abusing them physically. Jan Repass, the dean of students, was accused of sexually harassing female students.

In the 29-page report, one student, a 16-year-old boy, said that Kelly invited him to his Baxter apartment to "teach him sex." The visits included strip poker, bondage, and nude photography, and Kelly often paid him, the boy said. Two other boys also said Kelly sexually abused them.

Other former students said that Youngs beat them on the head with closed fists, dragged them by the hair, slapped them, and screamed at them.

In 1976, six years before the attorney general's investigation, at least three Baxter teachers had independently reported suspected abuse to the Maine Department of Education, but no action was taken. By the time the attorney

general investigated, it was too late to press charges. The statute of limitations had expired.

The attorney general's report cited the department's failure to respond to the earlier complaints about Baxter, calling it "an inexcusable abdication of the Department's power and duty to supervise" the school.

Why it took so long for the complaints to become public had a lot to do with the school's power over students, former students said. The school discouraged parents from learning to sign and some staff members couldn't communicate with the deaf, Martineau said.

He also said the abuse was so widespread, it included older students as well as staff. As a result, a place intended to give deaf children companionship made them afraid of each other.

"I was very confused," Martineau said. "Over the years, I just became used to the environment. I thought, 'Oh, this is the way it is.' "

Glenn Pelletier, one of Martineau's dorm mates, said he was physically and sexually abused by a female Baxter employee. Although, he said, he wasn't sure whether the abuse was wrong, he told Youngs what was happening.

"Youngs did nothing," said Pelletier. Youngs, Kelly, and Repass all denied the abuse and resigned before the state finished its investigation. State Senator Sharon Treat of Gardiner, who co sponsored the current bill for compensation, said no criminal charges were filed against school employees, in part because so much time had passed that the allegations would have been difficult to prove. Youngs died in 1990. Kelly continues to draw a state pension, said Baxter's school board chairwoman, Roxanne Baker, but his whereabouts are unknown.

For years Martineau didn't tell even his parents about the abuse. Instead, he turned to alcohol and drugs. Two years ago, he decided to fight back.

"I thought, 'I have had enough,' " Martineau said. "I have had enough frustration and addiction. I am going to start talking."

That is when Martineau, with the help of counselors and others in the deaf community, formed A Safer Place. At the first meetings, there were just two or three people. They met monthly to talk and to seek justice.

As a result, there is now a toll-free, 24-hour crisis counseling hotline for abuse survivors. Posters with crisis phone numbers are plastered all over Baxter.

One of the group's first and most outspoken members was James Levier, 60, of Scarborough, who also said he was abused at Baxter. On March 16, Levier grabbed a hunting rifle and paced in front of the neighborhood Shop 'n Save. One hour later, Levier was dead, shot by police, who said he had pointed the rifle at them.

The long wait for justice, friends and family members said, was just too much. Levier was depressed and frustrated by how long the state was taking.

Days after Levier's death, Governor Angus King publicly apologized to the deaf community for the abuse at Baxter and called for compensation.

"It was a tragedy," the governor said of Levier's death. "He gave up prematurely. He didn't realize how close we were to the resolution he sought."

But even now, the compensation is not guaranteed. With lower-than-expected revenues this year, it will be difficult to find the money in this year's budget, King said.

On a recent afternoon, a roomful of former Baxter students - many with their hair thin and graying - squeezed into a

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Portland conference room for the monthly meeting of A Safer Place. Since Levier's death, the group has quadrupled.

In spite of what happened at Baxter, many students want to protect the school, which is no longer state-run. They don't want it closed down. Their aim now is prevention.

"What we are doing," Pelletier said, "is opening the doors, not allowing this oppression to continue. We are showing the world that we are not going to allow this to happen ever again."

**LOAD-DATE:** June 11, 2001

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**GRAPHIC:** PHOTO, 1. GLOBE PHOTO/FRED J. FIELD /Peter Martineau, who says he was abused for years at the Governor Baxter School for the Deaf, at a meeting in Portland last month. 2. GLOBE PHOTO/FRED J. FIELD /Roxanne Baker, left, and counselor Sara Treat during a meeting on alleged abuses at Baxter School for the Deaf.

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