

False Allegations and Cardinal Pell

Saturday, 30 July 2016

This nasty affair revives a thought. In my case 16 years ago one man, who I cannot remember ever meeting, claimed I put my hand on his knee - he understood my intentions and rushed away after this one and only encounter, never seeing me again. He claimed he was 12 at the time. We proved that a photo he said I had given him had not been taken until several years later which would have made him 16. He admitted he might have confused the dates. Amazingly the jury found me guilty. He was one of my five conviction "victims".

Now leaving aside these details (and my question - if I'd never met him, how did he obtain the photo of which, co-incidentally - several copies had been seized by police raiding my house), what always puzzled me was - why, if he invented this tale, did he not claim much worse assault? After all, I could not prove he was lying and if police were happy to regard his story as evidence, why not make it worse?

I came to the conclusion that he genuinely believed his story; perhaps from some grain of truth (he might have come to my house with friends and I had no recollection). And simply either linked another experience to that or exaggerated it in his head. Had he intentionally been after money, compensation or whatever, he would have made up a worse story.

The strange stories about Cardinal Pell have a similar ring to them. Perhaps he did sometimes go swimming. And was naked in changing rooms. Time, media coverage, helpful police or counsellors - the incident is coloured up. But not enough to imply a desire for cash or greater attention (like "Nick" or my original false accuser). Otherwise surely the false accuser would make it far worse.

The worst false allegations are exaggerations, not inventions. A grain of truth becomes a tree of lies.