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Rough Justice : The Rex Haig Story

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Chapter 8

Remanded in custody (Pages 73-75)

When I was first charged with murder, Frank Hogan, who was David Hogan's grandfather and my ex-father-in-law, offered me money for my defence. This was the first time he had spoken to me since I left his daughter, Erin Hogan, nine years previously. Frank had banned David from his house after a series of thefts. He was old-school: straight, hard-working, and honest as the day is long. He spoke to me again at court in Invercargill, a few months later, when my warrant was being renewed. Again he offered me money, shook my hand and wished me luck. A few months after that, when Frank took sick, he asked to see me. Prison staff escorted me to Invercargill's Kew Hospital hospice. He told me then that he was tired and exhausted and he just wanted to die. We never mentioned David's name. We didn't need to. Frank said, 'Rex, all I want before I go, is to see you get out of there.' He died three days later.

My kids wanted me at the funeral with them. The Prison Service agreed, but Sergeant Dave Evans vetoed it. Someone who attended the funeral said that Evans was overheard telling Neil Hogan, 'Oh, Haig is only trying to make out that he is a compassionate person, but we won't allow that.'

I didn't go, but I didn't need to. I had known Frank for over 30 years and I respected him. He was a good man.

Instead of the speedy trial I was entitled to, the process was dragged out for 14 months, giving the prosecution every chance to lash some sort of case together, while I languished in jail on remand. In Invercargill I was in a prison cell that measured nine feet by five. It had a concrete floor, a bed, a small metal bench and a chair. My toilet was an eight-litre plastic bucket. In this space I ate all my meals. Every 24 hours, I was allowed an hour's exercise in a yard that was seven paces by two and a half, and completely surrounded by wire netting. I believe I would have been prosecuted by the SPCA if I had kept a dog in those conditions for 14 months. There is no way I would

have treated Sam, my golden Labrador, like that. Exercise time was my only chance to talk to anyone else, other than visitors.

A group of us at the prison made a formal complaint about the medieval conditions in the remand block, which was built in 1905, with barely a coat of paint added since. I was held there for the whole of 1995. It was so disgusting, having to eat in the same tiny cell as the plastic bucket you had to use as a toilet. There was not even a basin of water to wash your hands, and you had to sleep there as well, locked in after being fed, from 4 p.m. until 8 a.m. – 16 solid hours.

I had asked for a bucket and some disinfectant to wash my hands but got no response. I then asked to see the remand manager to complain about the lack of toilets or proper exercise. He at once became abusive, and threatened to send me up to Paparua Prison in Christchurch that same day. He refused outright to discuss my grievances. In later years, I found out how to complain to the ombudsman, telling him the conditions breached the Public Health Act, because we were forced to eat and defecate in the same space. Worse, we could not even flush anything away, but had to have the smell with us all night. I said it was degrading, inhuman, and unhygienic, and that none of the remand blocks – at Addington, Dunedin or Invercargill – had proper toilets. [...]

[...] Once, after three weeks at Addington, I asked for a mop and some disinfectant, but I got nothing, just as at Invercargill. I came close to emptying the entire crap bucket over the head of the screw who refused this request, telling me he 'didn't have the time'. I was then moved in with a junkie, who had been there for five weeks and had not once left his cell. It was absolutely filthy. Everything on the table was stuck to it by spilt food. The floor was sticky, and both piss buckets had brown stains, high up. There were cigarette butts, apple cores and orange peel strewn everywhere. He finally got sentenced and left. I cleaned that cell spotless. It took me three hours. I then had a shower and lay down, blissed-out to feel clean again. That lasted about ten minutes. I was told to pack my gear as I was leaving for Invercargill.