



📷 Criminologist Paul Wilson in 2004. Photo: Rob Maccoll

■ Crime and Court ■

The descent into darkness for former top Gold Coast academic Paul Wilson

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FORMER Gold Coast criminologist Paul Wilson had thoughts of killing himself after police charged him with the sexual abuse of a young girl and his life became a celebrity trial.

“He was very suicidal early in the process, about three years ago,” a close friend told the *Gold Coast Bulletin*.

But Wilson chose to fight, surviving two aborted trials, a hung jury and until late this week was confident of walking away from the Brisbane District Court.



Retired Queensland criminologist Paul Wilson arrives for this trial at the Brisbane District Court. (AAP Image/Dan Peled)

The 75-year-old retired academic and author had been accused of sexually abusing two girls at his Indooroopilly home in 1974 around the time of the Brisbane floods.

At the time, Wilson was the University of Queensland's most recognisable academic, not closeted liked many of his colleagues, building up strong outside connections with political powerbrokers like Police Commissioner Terry Lewis.

Smart and charismatic, always engaging in conversation, he was attractive to women.

Judge Julie Dick, in her sentencing remarks this week, reflected on "one part of his life" which was commendable. He had been awarded the Medal of Order of Australia for services for education.

But she said "nobody knows what goes on behind closed doors", adding that it was likely after more than 40 years "you have rehabilitated" because he had not reoffended.



📷 Paul Wilson at Bond University.

Paul Wilson maintains he is innocent. His close academic friends believe him.

Their past writings point to a flawed justice process involving “tainted memory” of adults bringing forward evidence of child abuse after several decades.

The troubles for Wilson took off after he left Bond University in June 2011. Police in a raid four months later at his Coast home seized photographs.

He returned from Singapore to Brisbane in November 2012 vowing to “fight the allegations” as speculation surfaced that police would charge him with sexual offences.



📷 Professor Paul Wilson arriving back in Australia.

Wilson had spoken to Professor Ian Coyle, having contributed three years earlier to their journal article “Out of the mouths of babes” which argued why expert evidence could rebut false sexual abuse allegations.

In their journal article, the central argument was the ultimate issue of guilt or innocence in child abuse cases being reduced to a “credibility contest” between the accused and the victim.

Both Professor Coyle and Wilson highlighted the “sloppy investigative procedures” of officers investigating child sexual abuse which could result in a miscarriage of justice.

Jurors would not have sufficient background specialist knowledge to enable them to work out whether the victim was lying, had a confused memory or picked up information after the event, they argued.

Professor Coyle put his friendships with the Wilsons at a distance given he wanted to explain all of this at the trial. “This would have raised the issue of false contaminated memory to centre stage,” he said.



📷 The Wilsons arriving at court.

But he was not called to give evidence. Meanwhile, after the first court appearances, television news footage prompted another complainant to come forward.

This was an independent witness, who had not spoken to the first complainant, and the Crown and subsequently the jury viewed that much of her evidence substantially corroborated the original complaint.

The Crown told the jury that Wilson met his alleged victim while she played with his daughter before inviting her to his bedroom to play hide-and-seek games and encouraging her to take off her clothes.

He lay naked on his bed with a cat covering his genitalia before removing it and stroking his penis. He digitally penetrated her, telling her “Percy is coming to play”, a nickname for his penis.

Wilson also groped her in the family’s swimming pool, forced her to dance naked while he touched himself — some of this while other children and adults were at the home.

The criminologist’s own thoughts on paedophiles is documented in the 1981 book *The Man They Called a Monster*, about Clarence Osborne, a Brisbane court stenographer who committed suicide in 1979 and allegedly kept records of offences against some 2500 victims.



📷 File picture of paedophile Clarence Osborne

Wilson wrote that the common view that the child was traumatised and sexually seriously damaged was a myth.

“Most paedophiles are not into “(expletive) little kids”, and, as we have seen time and time again sexual relationships are rarely forced,” he wrote.

“Indeed a substantial number of relationships are initiated by the child, continued by the child, and often, ended by the child or adolescent.”

Rather than being “dirty old men”, many paedophiles were close relatives or friends of the parent of the child and “go to considerable lengths to look after and protect the child”.

Wilson has a rich understanding of the crime around him at the Brisbane Correctional Centre. After an evaluation he should be considered a low risk and open prisoner. His lawyer Bill Potts confirmed an appeal was being considered.



📷 Gold Coast lawyer Bill Potts.

“We are closely considering the transcript, in particular the sentence and sentencing remarks compared to other cases,” he said. “A decision will be made in coming weeks.”

Friends remain divided on how the retired criminologist, who has several health problems, will survive in prison.

“He will be frankly suicidal,” Professor Coyle said. “This has been more than destructive for him and his wife. We’ve had two aborted trials, a hung jury, then the Crown has continued on. I think in Queensland legal history this is unheard of.”

Others contend that Wilson is in shock but still strongly maintaining his innocence. They see his resilience. He has told them “I will survive this”.