

"I don't want to go back, I promise I'll be good, please Mum"

"The ambulance will be here any minute now. You can come home again soon."

Mum replied.

The ambulance arrives, my tummy is so churned up; I am going to vomit, the tantrum begins, the tears flow, the begging continues all to no avail. To my childlike comprehension, Mum has gone deaf. She kisses me goodbye and hands me over to a very friendly ambulance driver who gently puts me in my seat and fastens my seatbelt.

"Oh no!" I think to myself, "quick Mum, time is running out, QUICK change your mind!" but she just waves. (I learnt later in life that every time Mum had to send me away, it broke her heart.)

As the ambulance pulls away, the mind games begin. "What did I do wrong? If I could only walk better. Maybe if I hadn't fought with my brothers."

The Ambulance continues down the Calder Highway towards Melbourne, all the while the two Ambulance drivers are asking me questions and chatting to me trying to distract me, hoping I will stop crying. In a last-ditch effort they resort to bribery. "If you cheer up, we will buy you Egg sandwiches and Butterscotch lollies".

Eventually that works. I'm not use to many treats so I'm more than happy to accept. Now I happily chatter back, but in my tummy I still have the feeling of dread and I know in my mind that once we pass "The Big Red Apple" in Harcourt, there is no way that this Ambulance will be turning around.

I was a child with Cerebral Palsy having to attend Marathon Spastic School in Melbourne as there were no appropriate facilities in country Victoria at that time. At six years of age this was a frightening and traumatic experience. Leaving my Mum, Dad and seven siblings to go and live in a hostel in the city, there are no words to describe the insecurity I felt. A little country kid who had been doted on by everyone up until now was now expected to be brave and deal with anything life through at her. Even though I was amongst adults to me they were strangers. I remember liking school, but absolutely hating the hostel life. There are

memories I can recall that are still painful to this day.

I wasn't a large eater and I remember being forced by the nursing staff to stay at the dining table by myself long after all of the other residents had left the dining room to finish everything that was on my plate. Often I would be there until dark.

When residing in a smaller hostel, Cottage number 8, I remember the "House Mother" an elderly woman would go off to church on Sunday evenings. She would tie the residents who were in danger of falling and hurting themselves into their beds. The rest of us would be locked in our bedrooms. She would leave us with no adult supervision. Even now I am terrified if my bedroom door is shut at night.

I do have some happy memories. I recall frolicking around on the lawn on a hot summers afternoon in a green square canvas paddling pool. I remember watching Play School on T.V. I loved this show and I loved watching it again with my children. At Christmas, the Police Force would put on a party for us. We were always given lovely presents. I did have some little friends at school. I'm sure I enjoyed playing with them. Overall I was a happy child. From what people have told me, I oozed charisma and had lots of personality.

"The Big Red Apple" also invokes happiness. On the odd occasion when the Ambulance drivers had to drop off a patient in Melbourne on a Friday and a return to Melbourne on a Monday, the Bendigo Ambulance station would contact mum and see if she would like me brought home for the weekend. They would do this free of charge. I will always have the utmost respect for the Ambulance service. If it hadn't been for their kindness it wouldn't have been possible for me to come home. On the trip home, once we had reached "The Big Red Apple" I knew that I was really going home. Pure elation would enter my heart. I was going to see my family. Over a period of two years I made this journey. "The Big Red Apple" was a security blanket for me. On one side was my safety, security, and happiness; on the other side was my fear, insecurity, and sadness. This treasured landmark holds bittersweet memories.



VICTORIA *Rose*

