

My name is Georgina. I am an older state ward of New South Wales. I have become member of CLAN (Care Leavers of Australia). From age three to twelve years, I spent at Saint.Catherine's Orphanage, Brooklyn. I was born at Crown Street Women's Hospital. I remember having a very lonely childhood. There was little contact with the nuns, because they were praying and doing their 'duties'. The food was meager as was the clothing. Chilblains were commonplace. I never had a birthday party or cake.

In the school holidays I would go to the foster parents, with one family the father offered me fire crackers if I would let him touch me sexually. I said no, and that I would tell. Fortunately he left me alone. No-one asked me what happened and I never told anyone about this. Fortunately, I was not placed with this family again.

In another family, the father beat me because of a conflict with his son, and the father also hit his wife. I was punched and pulled down the stairs by the hair and sent back to the orphanage that night. Again, no-one asked what had happened to me. I was nine years old.

I stayed at St. Catherine's until I was eleven years old.

The nuns would discipline us by using a cane. These beatings would frequently leave marks and cuts that would stay for days.

At eleven a family wanted to adopt me, but my mother wouldn't give permission. Therefore I was placed in a state home, Burdura Girls' Home.

After one month, I ran away with an older girl. When I was found by the police, I was taken back to Burdura and placed in the lock-up ward.

During my time waiting for court, I was given a compulsory virginity test. This was a frightening and invasive procedure. The result showed that I was a virgin.

In court I was not asked why I had run away. The judge ruled that I was "in moral danger".

I was sent to King Edward's State Home in Newcastle. I stayed there until I was fourteen years old.

From age fourteen to eighteen years, while I scrubbed their floors and cooked their meals, I remember watching their children going to school. Even then I felt this desperate longing to be able to learn.

Instead of parties and pretty clothes, I spent my teenage years living in one of my three blue uniforms. For six days a week I worked from 7:00am to 7:00pm, with no pay. My room was the place beneath the stairs, which was only big enough for a bed and I had one day off.

As a ward of the state, I have been verbally, physically and mentally abused. I had no rights and very little education.



I was asked how this affected me, like many of us older wards of the state, we now find ourselves in a position, where many have adult literacy problems where many of us cannot spell or add up, and some cannot read.

In my relationships I struggle with trust and choosing non-abusive partners, and I still have a feeling of low self-esteem, and have struggles with depression. I have had to fight to get counseling.

As an example of how the past still affects my life today, five years ago my work sent me to some lectures on childcare. I was so happy for any learning I could receive. I arrived next day at the address I was given to find it was the old children's court where I had been sentenced. I was so traumatized, I could not get out of the car. When I walked through the doors I almost fainted. I told the woman in the office that I did not think I could stay, and that I had been one of the children that had come through these courts.

The School Co-ordinator, Elizabeth, took me aside and said if it was too much for me, to go into the office, as the lecture I was to attend was to be held in the actual courtrooms where I had been sentenced. I don't think I had ever been so totally shell-shocked. All I do to justify it all was that I was learning to help the children that I worked with.

I left there that day and sat in my car and sobbed.

I was sentenced in the courts for being "in moral danger". I had run away with my friend from Burdura Girls' Home.

How does anyone come to terms with such a traumatic childhood that still confronts you today in your workplace?

The girl that had been sentenced with me had been brutally raped in front of me. I never saw her again after being sentenced. At that stage I would have been about nine years old.

No family was at the birth of my beautiful daughter, no-one was at my marriage. I had no Mothers' Days, Fathers' Days, or Christmases. To this day I cannot help my daughter at uni with her work like other mums and dads, as I cannot spell and am quite illiterate. I could not help with homework through to year 12, like other mums and dads. I love my daughter dearly, but I feel a great void of what I could have been and could have become had I been given the chance of an education like any other child.

Even at eighteen, after leaving the state's care, I had no idea how to catch a bus, or how to pay my fare, or any idea of the outside world after being institutionalized. It was very hard to fit into a society of which I had absolutely no knowledge or experience.

I'm glad as a state ward that we now have a national enquiry, and hope that myself and the other children that experienced the traumas that we were subjected to will finally get the chance to be heard. Through our stories I hope that these experiences will never happen to any other children again.

Georgina Fraser.

