



MARGARET BISSETT

19th July 2003.

TO THE SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCE COMMITTEE.

As a child I was abused physically and mentally whilst living in Ballarat with the nuns at Nazareth House.

At the age of three years I was made a ward of the state and placed into Nazareth house (24th October, 1944) until I was told I could leave at 15 years old. (26th April 1956)
My life at Nazareth House was absolute 'hell' I was subjected to much abuse both physically and mentally.

I have described some of the incidents which occurred to me whilst I was at Nazareth house. I feel these have had a huge impact on my life as a person. The nuns I have named were the main people who dished out such hate and brutality to me

Sister Melitis would continually smash my head into a brick wall and I also had my head bashed together with another child. I suffer continuously with migraines and I'm sure these are a result of the damage this person caused, she would also slam my head into the desk which would often leave me with a huge lump on my forehead and some terrible headaches.

Sister Theaus used a piece of dowel for punishments, this could be because I spoke in class or not writing as well as she thought we should. - she would hit me on the top of my skull with this piece of dowel.

As a small child playing, I fell and hurt my (right) wrist, saw Sister Peter walking towards me and told her of the incident - she suggested that I soak my wrist in hot and cold water alternatively and she would return later to look at it.

She didn't bother to return, I was belted because I was late for bed and also because I was crying as a result of my sore wrist. Nobody bothered to fix the problem until the following day at approximately lunchtime when it was noticed that my hand was black & blue and I was unable to use it. I was continually crying with the pain and it was then I was taken to the Ballarat Base Hospital where it was found my wrist was broken, the bone was pushed back into place without any anaesthetic and a half cast was put on for about six weeks and then after that time it was x-rayed and found it still hadn't healed properly so they then applied a full plaster on my arm. This incident with the broken wrist caused me many problems as I was unable to do what was required by the nuns, and I was punished continually. eg. I received many beltings because my writing wasn't up to the beautiful standard it normally was.

Sister Melitis was often on duty in the diningroom and I suffered as a result of her brutality. At least 3 - 4 times I was forced to eat my food after I had vomited it, I was unable to swallow any meat with skin on and if I did eat it, it would resurface very quickly & Melitis would force me to eat the vomit.

Once with some holiday hosts at Balmoral I was sexually interfered with by a farmhand - I became depressed, withdrawn and sulky as I was unable to tell the people what happened to me. they returned me back to Nazareth House where I was thrashed because I hadn't behaved. By the time the nuns had finished flogging me I was covered with bruises

As a child I was told that my parents were dead, they stated that 'you have nobody because we picked you up out of the gutter.'

Imagine later on in life discovering that they weren't dead and that I was one of many children.

I was told 'I was good for nothing'

'I'd amount to nothing', that I was evil and that I was the devil's child

This abuse and these statements have destroyed my self esteem and scarred me into my adult life which as you can see I'm well into. My time at Nazareth House was the most degrading part of my life and it is only since I joined a support group that I can now start to deal with it, they have given me the courage to try and deal with what happened to me as a child.

The sisters of Nazareth House do have a lot to answer for and they should be made to pay compensation for the trauma they have caused, we were placed by the government into their hands and so they are accountable for what happened.

I was a child to be loved not abused!!!!

Thankyou for giving me the opportunity to be part of this enquiry, I hope that through all of this that the government learns from their mistakes and makes sure that no child suffers as we did in these terrible institutions.