

MARK GREENHALGH

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Suite S1 59
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE

My name is Marcus Paul Greenhalgh. I am 62 years of age.
The abuse I suffered as a child in 'care facilities' has affected my whole life.

I am making this submission because I believe that the truth should finally be revealed about what happened. It has taken me fifty years to be able to talk about it.

I make this submission with the following proviso:

Should the Committee accept my submission, that it will in no way prevent me from publishing my biography, which is currently nearing completion and which contains details of my experiences in the said facilities.

The following is a brief outline of these experiences:

I was born in Queensland on 27th February, 1941.

At the age of seven I was termed 'a neglected child in need of proper care and protection' and made a Ward of the State of Queensland. I was removed from my mother, brothers and sisters, and placed into St Vincent's Orphanage in Nudgee, Brisbane.

The Roman Catholic Sisters of Mercy who ran the orphanage were vicious and cruel. They abused the boys physically, sexually and emotionally. We were constantly cold, hungry, suffering from beatings, and made to feel worthless and unwanted.

Just before I turned 12 years old I was sentenced to Westbrook Farm Home for Boys near Toowoomba in country Queensland. Although sentenced to only two years, I was forced to remain incarcerated for 5 ½ years until shortly before I turned 18. Nobody ever explained why.

Westbrook was a state-run reformatory for boys between the ages of 10 – 18 years old. The warders who ran the place were sadistic and brutal. We were treated as slave labour under the harshest conditions, working from dawn to dusk each and every day in the fields, the quarry, the farm, the kitchens, bathrooms and laundries. I was deprived of proper schooling when they refused to allow me to sit for my scholarship exam and sent me to work full time on the farm when I was still 13 years old.

Most of the warders used sadistic methods to control and punish us, but the worst of them all was the superintendent, Mr Ray Golledge. This man seemed to take great pleasure in humiliating us publicly, flogging us with his heavy leather belt while we knelt naked at his feet. You could receive anything up to 60 lashes and you always ended up bleeding profusely. Sometimes boys lost consciousness. They were the lucky ones.

We were physically and verbally abused and degraded. Punishments were excessively cruel. He called us 'wasters', 'filthy low-down scum', 'yellow dogs', etc. We were denied proper medical treatment unless hospitalisation was necessary (even that was sometimes withheld). Golledge often operated on us himself, using knives from the kitchen.

Naturally, there was also sexual abuse. It took place in the showers, mostly. Sometimes it was the warders who did it, other times it was the bigger, older boys who abused the smaller, younger ones. Oddly enough, though, in a place so full of brutality, sexual abuse did not rank as highly as the other forms of abuse – such as mental and emotional torture, lack of adequate clothing, shortage of food, and the strings of punishment that never seemed to end. That sexual abuse was the least of our worries should tell you how bad things really were.

Even if you were not guilty of a certain 'crime', you were often still punished because nobody listened to you and nobody believed you. Sometimes a whole group would be punished because nobody owned up.

We boys at Westbrook had nobody to turn to. Some of them (like myself) were considered 'delinquents', but many were just orphans who were too old for the orphanage yet had nowhere else to go. They were treated just as badly.

The warders seemed to enjoy setting us boys against each other, encouraging us to fight for their amusement, then punishing us afterwards. Punishments took the form of 'Walking the Path', a practice where you were made to walk endlessly up and down between two posts in the ground – every waking moment – and often for months at a time. 'Kangaroo Hopping' was something they made you do for hours on end in the dormitory, either naked or wearing your wet pyjamas. Other punishments were 'Duck Walking', 'Leg Raisers' and Push-ups by the hundred.

Even though we worked hard for our food, we were always kept near starvation point at Westbrook. All the best produce that we grew was sent to the markets to be sold. We were left with only the maggoty, the mouldy, the weevilly and the stale. I am not exaggerating. I wish I were.

We were not allowed to have butter on our bread (even though we produced our own), while the warders and their families received all the milk, cream and butter they wanted.

The animals we raised – mainly cows and pigs – were better fed than us boys. Many of them won prizes at the Toowoomba Show. Sometimes we sneaked some of the animal fodder from the troughs, just to keep from starving. At other times we might eat some of

the raw crops, such as green beans or peas or corn, but anytime someone was caught, he was flogged by Golledge and force-fed large amounts of castor oil so that the 'stolen' food would be returned by vomiting or diarrhoea.

We were never paid for any of our work. The first day I ever held money in my hand was on the day of my release in August 1958. I didn't even know what I would be able to buy with the ten shillings they gave me.

The long-term effects of my brutal experiences are many. Upon release, I was not prepared for living in 'the outside world'. All my life I had been forced to fight for survival, to take any opportunity that offered itself, with only my own well-being in mind. Consideration for others was never taught and never learned. When you grow up in an institution you know better than to trust another human being – it could cost you your life.

In the 'outside world' I found myself completely at a loss. I was unable to behave socially and responsibly, because the rules were different but nobody had told me what they were. Before long I was in trouble with the law and, as predicted by the staff at Westbrook, found myself doing time in adult prisons.

The actions that placed me there were my own, I accept that. But what I cannot accept is responsibility for the antisocial behaviour and attitudes they had instilled in me at Westbrook.

I feel that I am entitled to blame the so-called 'care givers' who, by their own actions, had shaped the innocent boy into the troubled young man who was dumped without preparation into a society that was very different to anything he had ever known.

I was not the only boy to suffer at Westbrook Farm Home for Boys.

At least three magisterial Inquiries have been conducted into the administration of Westbrook, in particular the Schwarten Inquiry of 1961 (three years after my release), which led to the public exposure of the brutality of the regime. The Schwarten Report openly condemns and criticises the poor standards of food and deficient clothing, the inadequate hygiene, the excessive punishment and drill, and above all, the *'retributive, repressive and punitive atmosphere'*.

What sickens and concerns me is WHY was the Report kept secret for thirty years? Why were the findings not brought to the attention of the public immediately, forcing changes to be made? I believe it was criminally negligent on the part of the authorities to 'sit on' this information until the newspapers finally got hold of it in 1994 and forced them to act.

I'm a survivor. They may have beaten me, but they never managed to break me. Others were not so fortunate. Some of Australia's Most Wanted criminals are graduates of the Westbrook regime.

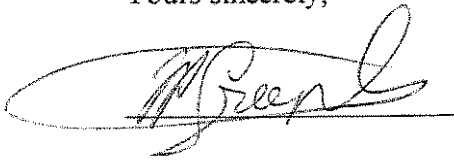
It took me quite some time but I eventually found a certain measure of peace. I married a very understanding and loving woman and we have been blessed with many wonderful

children and grandchildren. I would hate for any one of them to go through experiences like mine.

I have moved on with my life, but the memories and scars are still there, and always will be.

I hope this submission will be of some assistance to the Committee and that it will assist in ensuring that such abuse of children in institutions will never be repeated.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'M Greenhalgh', written over a horizontal line.

Mark Greenhalgh

(ATTACHED ARE PHOTOCOPIES OF
RELEVANT NEWSPAPER ARTICLES)