

The Wasted Years

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for Rosey

A REMEMBERED ACCOUNT OF MY 8 YEARS
AT DALMAR CHILDREN'S HOME, 1947-1955

That day in August 1947, from what I remember was a sunny winter's day one. I was to begin a journey that would change ^{my} life, as I knew it, me being all of 4½ yrs of age. My brother Paul was 2 yrs old then but had been away from us for 6 months. My mother told me that he was on holidays, being a trusting little girl I believed her, not knowing I was about to join him for the same holiday which ~~he~~ was to become 8 long years.

I remember the train ride out to Barlingford & being excited at the prospect of seeing my brother & for some reason a cousin who lived in the country, after all my Mum told me I ~~was~~ was going on holidays in the country & I trusted what she said. We walk down the long hill from Tarnahill into a place called Dalmar, past the milking sheds and then I see ~~a~~ who I think is my cousin Rosemary in her blue velvet coat & felt safe until I found it wasn't her, this was to be my home for all those years, my Mum just left me & I said she

would be back. Can't remember when I first saw my brother, I was little & he was a baby.

My memory of these ^{early} times are very sketchy as we were only little ones. Our mother came to see us but not to take us home, our father never came - and the night mares or terrors began. I just remember waking up screaming right after night. I wet the bed continually & was made to walk in shame with wet sheets & held up to ridicule. I remember sleep walking one night & going to the toilet in my sleep & woke up in the hall trying to hide it I was scared because I would be punished. I remember being told when I was about 7 that my mother was dying & I wouldn't see her again, so cold, no cuddles, just left to work it out in my little mind. Can you imagine what that is like... your dad doesn't come to see you, you're told your Mum is dying & your left to get on with it all at the age of 7!! Of course I would have panicked & so the night mares still came & then my brother Paul started with his own night mares & sleepwalking & so it continued.

The bed wetting, I found out later was ~~due~~ due to a genetic fault (my wetters were going into my bladder the wrong way) & I was operated on 20 yrs later, so the wet sheet treatment didn't cure me, it totally humiliated me.

My parents paid for out keep

occasionally but most of the time didn't & as such we were made to pay. My brother & I were caned many times by Don Stewart for things I don't know why. Canings any time, anywhere. I suffered with winter cuts on my legs & that was one of his favourite places to hit. He was an extremely cruel, hard, sadistic man & in this day & age would not be put in that position. More on him later.

I just wanted to go home, many of the kids did "a bunk". Oh how I wish I was so brave. They were brought back & worse punishment would come, some were sent to Brush Farm & to some of us that was a fate worse ~~than~~ than death.

I remember sitting where the lockers were in New^{man} House (Big Girl Home) & wishing I was brave enough to run away home. I packed my bag with my beloved books, I had just been in terrible trouble, more caning, because I wrote to my Mother & didn't know that "they" read our letters & censored them (I just wanted to go home) when my mother came to visit us (sometimes these privileges were taken away from us) we had to sit next one of the staff so they could listen if we told Mum what they were doing to us.

I used to have to wear corrective boots because of problems with my feet & ankle. Mum must of been paying them but later on that I presume changed as I remember sitting on the floor of the top

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play area in the Big House & looking through a box of shoes to see what fitted, no one helped me just did it. One day my mother brought me hand me down clothes from my cousin & I was punished by Don Stewart again because Mum wasn't paying. She also bought me a signet ring for my Christmas birthday, that was taken off me & Don Stewart told me again that I couldn't have it because Mum wasn't paying & you guessed it I got canded again. ^{he told Mum I was selfish & believed her} Many times this happened. I used to make the lunches for the kids to take to school. If the kitchen staff were late, I was late & my porridge was put on table until the lunches were finished & I had to eat the porridge cold & I would throw it up & then get canded (I can't stand porridge amongst other revolting lumpy things I was forced to eat). It became so bad I can still see & hear Don Stewart walking around the dining tables with the cane & hitting the tables. Telling us if we weren't on our second helping by the time he got to us we would be canded. I was so scared I'd never lied before, but this time I did. I was & still am a slow eater & fussy as so many things remind of those times. My brother used to carry the bits he didn't like out in his pockets until he got caught & eat them a belt.

Many of us were bright intelligent kids but if we weren't paid for, we weren't encouraged at all. I was into poetry, stage acting & painting. I painted Westminster Abbey when I was 10 or 11 for the annual art competition. Only God knows what happened but Mrs Stewart & Sister Robbins wouldn't allow me to finish it. (I needed 10 minutes to finish the stain glass windows but was sent to bed. Sister Sharp, who was an artist & very kind, tried to intervene for me but to no avail. I don't know where that painting is, but kids from the Home always remember me for it. I've had many attempts to start painting again but I never really finish. I was the same at school, an excellent student as my reports show, I was Top Girl at Carlingford Public School but Dalmar never acknowledged or encourage me. I won a bursary, I now know I did (I was told I just failed) I remember my Headmaster Mr Fowler telling Don Stewart that I could only go to either Hornsey Girls High or Athlfield & that I couldn't go to Carlingford because I was too bright. I still hear Mr Stewart saying that there was no way that I was going to an exclusive school. At about that time in my life I decided I wasn't going to try

hard & be ambitious because I just kept getting punished. You weren't allowed to achieve. About this time my mum married again & finally got us out of the place - not before many formalities of adoption & being released from being State wards.

The best thing I liked was Sunday School, Church, Christian Endeavour, Guides & Red Cross. I always did well in the State Sunday school exams. I also found that this area & school that I was encouraged but when it came back to the Home NEVER. I remember Morning prayers or Assembly whatever where announcements were made where kids did something well but I remember that Don Stewart never once gave me any acknowledgment even when I was Top Girl in 6th class. Can you imagine how that felt to a young kid.

Those are things that happened to me that I've blocked out, others have told me ^{what happened} but I have no memory. I have a part memory of being in the bathroom at the Big Home & remember blood & being scared. One time people were with me, I think I fell off on the chair & the spokes cut my groin, the other time I was by myself, I think.

We used to have to make our beds perfectly, wait for inspection, if it wasn't right, the bed would be stripped & we would do it again & so on until

the sisters would get angry & strip all the down beds & you would make them before you went to your early jobs (mine making the lunches) sometimes I missed breakfast altogether but I didn't care, better than cold porridge, yuk!!

Sometimes Paul & I would get to work together. I had to collect the fire wood & he the cow pats & we both kept watch for each other. In the babies home I use to bring the washing in & Paul did the yard. Sometimes I had extra homework & Paul would get the washing for me, still keeping a watchful eye because we would get ^{into trouble for helping each other.} I polished the main dining hall with an industrial polish which I could hardly see over the top of let alone control. We were ~~so~~ virtual used a lot as child labour. I washed windows (I am in the movie doing it) no streaks allowed, do it again, or be caned. I was told I was locked in the bathroom at big girls home (I was probably about 9 or 10) I was being ~~be~~ bullied ^{by Susan Robbins} & stood up for myself, I was thrown into the bathroom, there was a window open & I tried to get out but was pushed back in again. I praise God I don't remember that!

I was not caned at school even through my senior years when I left the home. It was obviously we were punished because we weren't paid for I wanted to be ⁱⁿ school & church

always because I was happy then
 I married young & it didn't last long.
 I had two children but I made sure that
 my children were with me always. I felt
 I had failed in my marriage & I wasn't
 or mustn't be good enough for some
 one to love me. My self esteem
 was well and truly shot. I started
 to drink, even though I hated it but
 I now know it was my way of punishing
 myself for my failures. I had many
 relationships, looking for love all the
 time & my heart was broken many
 times, you see I had never been really
 loved & that was the most important
 thing for me. Some relationships
 were abusive, emotionally & some
 physical & I put up with it because it
 was more important for me to have
 someone than no one ^{as I knew no other way} & eventually
 found my father & was ~~able~~ ^{able} to
 reconcile with him before he died.
 I am now a born again Christian &
 I have just given my Testimony to
 Yeshua - Jesus my Saviour & I pray
 that my story will help others because
 I still remember that 4½ girl on a
 warm winters day who thought
 she was going on a holiday - 8 yrs.
 I've just found out that we have
 another brother & I pray to the Lord that
 we all meet again one day & make
 up for the wasted years.