



Stephen Douglas

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Attention: The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Institutional Care as a Child

Dear Sir / Madam

I would firstly like to say that I'm grateful for the opportunity to send in a letter covering my brother's and my own story of our experience's we both had while in children's institutions. I apologise for the letter being late but was told that it would be still accepted if I hurried up and submitted it for a contribution towards the inquiry into "Children in Institutional Care".

I was born in Crown Street Women's Hospital in early February 1954 and my brother was born 12-months later to the same parent's in late February 1955. We were raised by our mother and father up until the age of five & six years in the suburb of Croydon but my mother & father were only very young themselves with no living skills which resulted to them both constantly fighting. The only memories I can remember of my mother and father being together is when it was a violent occasion, no happy memories at all. Eventually mum ran for her life and with none of the support networks available at the end of the fifties she left us with dad and we found ourselves (my brother & myself) in a children's home over at Davidson Road, Concord. The home was run by the Church of England I think but I do remember how bloody terrible the institution was. We were only there for a short time between 1960 - 61, after complaining to dad about the place he pulled us out. I remember while we were there that we only got a bath once a week and that the same bath water was used for all the boys. Also I can't remember even getting a hot meal, all I remember getting to eat was cakes and bread rolls. The staff were cruel as well and I still remember one incident when one of the male carers punched a young girl down onto the floor while we all (the kids) looked on!

Back at home in Croydon, dad advertised for a house keeper to look after Peter my younger brother and myself and I vaguely remember the first one that came into our lives, she was young and pretty and didn't stay long because dad probably put the hard word on her, I don't remember anything else about this women. Then came another house keeper and I don't know if dad got her through an advert or picked her up at the pub but I remember that she drank a lot (just like dad) and was up the pub playing up with other men when dad was at work. I know this because a friend of dad's came down one day to our house and told me and my brother who in turn we told dad. This resulted in a huge fight with fists, broken glass and furniture and of course blood. I remember this woman's name was Ms Eaton and she used to flash her underclothes by pulling up her dress when dad ofcourse wasn't home and she also sexually abused me a few times by fondling

There were a lot of frightening fights between Ms Eaton and dad that often went long into the night and would even sometimes spill out into the street. When there was no house keeper available then my brother and myself would have to fend for our selves which was very frightening for a couple of boys who at this stage of life are only six & seven! I can remember often going to school with no breakfast of any lunch to take to school. There were many other incident's which were to have a profound effect on my self and my brother in later life.

Eventually we were to meet a new house keeper who was quite old (around grandpops age) and she was very kind to us both. Her name was Mrs Maine and she used to read us Winnie the Pooh. She owned a property over at Dee Why and we would sometimes go over there for a weekend. Mrs Maine told dad about a children's home she knew of that might be suitable for my brother & myself at Seaforth called Dalwood. So from about the years of 1962- 64 peter and myself were to stay at Dalwood Children's Home which is situated at the top of Seaforth on Frenches Forest Road. This was to be a better home as far as food and hygiene was concerned but there was quite a lot of physical and emotional abuse. Taking the focus off me for a minute, I remember one of the female carers at Dalwood flogging Peter one morning before we went to school and he was that distressed when he got to school that he had to be driven back to Dalwood to see the sister (nurse), whom I might add was one of the few kind person's at Dalwood and her name I remember was sister McDonald. As far as I am concerned, I can remember many incidents where violence was cruelly inflicted upon me. The one that stands out the most was one night I was taken down stairs to the main foyer and flogged with a strap and kicked while the nurse who was on shift just smiled and looked on. This all happened late at night to I might add, I was crying a lot but the punishment just kept going. I can't even remember what the flogging was for but this was a regular occurrence to many of the children at Dalwood. I will never forget that bastard's name, Mr Gammel and his bitch of a fucking wife was Matron Gammel, I'm still a bit angry and find it hard not to swear!! There were a few good times at Dalwood as well but mostly bad times. Another name I remember was one of the carers, Ms Gordon who was very cruel and very heavy handed, I would think nothing of spitting in her face today and she is certainly responsible for a lot of emotional damage.

Eventually, we left Dalwood and came back to Croydon but I don't remember much about life in Croydon except other than the help we used to get from our neighbours, we basically brought our selves up and we are still only around nine and ten years of age. Mr & Mrs Howell who lived next door were very kind to Peter and myself, often offering assistance to us both in times of need. I don't like to grill dad because he did the best he could with what skills he had which were pretty limited. Having said that both Peter and myself went with out proper meals, no proper furnishings, no books- T.V. or home supervision in our adelesant years right up into our teens. We often ran the streets not really getting into any trouble, our main play ground was the storm water cannal we also found solace in the cannal as well. Not only were Peter & myself brought up in institutions that we very abusive but we also had to put up with a womanising father who drank too much, it was a male dominated upbringing with no mother or sister in our lives we didn't really get to see much love or affection. I can still hear my father saying " Shut the fuck up or I will give you something to cry about" so we couldn't even own our feelings! I used to love Mrs Maine reading us " Winnie the Pooh", she also took us to see "Pinochio" and for years I use to dream about the beautiful young fairy in the animated story, they were animated films that had a happier life style than our own reality.

Peter and myself were deprived of a decent academic education, no sex education and certainly suffered very low self esteem because of the abusive and demeaning upbringing. We both left high school in 4th year (year 10) and started to experiment with different types of drugs (mainly cannabis & L.S.D.) and also went straight into the Public Bar. What was to follow was a life of violent youth drinking and drugging which landed both my brother and myself into lockups. I went one better and wound up in Jail for assault while under the influence of alcohol. Both Peter and myself have had to fumble through life with virtually no living skills. We both have numerous broken marriages and relationships behind us with the end result for me especially ending up deeper into active alcoholism and drug addiction.

Our mother was to come back into our lives after over a thirty year absence and I didn't handle it very well at all due to the fact I was heavily into alcohol and drugs (cannabis and speed) which I reverted back to a little child and broke down. Not long after mum arrived back on the scene I was to lose my then family, defacto wife of fifteen years, step daughter and natural son; due to my violence on the home front fueled by my active alcoholism and over indulgence of snorting speed. This was to be the start of a new life for me and I staggered into Alcoholics Anonymous at the original advice of my then doctor at Green Valley which is where I was living at the time. So what has happened in the last eleven odd years is I have remained sober and worked very hard at trying to organise a normal life. I've had to learn to grow up as well as find out about myself because I never knew who I was, I was always trying to be someone else because I hated myself and the rest of the world so much.

Today after, hospitalisations, detoxes, suicide attempts, lots of therapy and A.A. meetings, heaps of crying and eventually learning to forgive my father and loving my mother instead of hateing her, I have I life where not everything is rosy but I'm more accepting of life on life's terms. Recently my brother contacted a therapist who helped me for years and I feel that may be he can get a better understanding of life for himself. We both still have our problems and I'm very lonely with a string of broken relationships behind me and I'm still struggling in certain areas today.

In closing I would like to say that this is not a witch hunt for me but there where plenty of people who where supposed to be my carer and failed short by just abusing me and my brother instead. Much thanks to A.A. and all the wonderful people that have come into my life through the 12 steps. If it wasn't for the wonderful therapist's and the 12-step recovery programs that I was fortunate enough to come onto contact with, then I most certainly would have been dead by now. I hope you can use this letter and I can tell you one thing for sure, I haven't stayed sober for over 11-years with my background without being very honest, in other words the whole of this letter is fact!

Yours Sincerely


S Douglas