

BETSEY ASHDOWN (BETSEY ^{NEE} ROWLES) born 1932
age 70

in the W.R. BLACK HOME FOR GIRLS (PRESBYTERIAN)
LAUREL AVENUE
CHELMER BRISBANE QLD

from Dec 1940 - June 1951. (age just 8 - 18½)

When I was 7 (1940) my mother died of cancer. I had had a very happy start - with 2 older brothers and a little sister - in a happy family.

This however broke up my family (a war on). I was never to know happiness again or to overcome the stress of life, (as my father said he put me,) "in a good Church Home", from these 10½ years. I have survived - it was the best I could do.

No one told me my mother died. ?

I found myself immediately called "a GUTTER SNIPER" told I would "wind up in the gutter, WHERE I BELONGED" constantly, over and over, down the years.

There was no medicine chest, tooth-brushes, NO mirrors for growing girls.

No rules or guidance was given us - (NO) sex education, nutritional advice, hygiene lessons, sewing lessons.

I never went in a shop as a child.

As the food was POOR and SCANTY (we ate the fruit in the grounds, pigweed, nasturtiums, pumpkin seeds) I was always hungry.

The work load for all children was heavy - with only 2 ^{OUTSIDE} staff in a household of 40 odd - girls grew up and became staff, poorly paid and over-worked,

"home" - but we never stopped working to keep it so
clothes, dolls, toys donated were LOCKED up
"in the attic" on the top floor - not for the likes of
us, but for DISOLVING only - NO TOYS.

We had to learn the BIBLE, catechesis off
by heart - I can still recite it - and punched
in the mouth or otherwise beaten for NOT getting it
quickly enough.

"God is Love" with a BLACK EYE (literally
a black eye)

We were PRILLED about official visitors and
sang and entertained for their pleasure. God help
us if we made a wrong move - LATER.

No one in 10 years hugged me - even
touched me pleasantly? - or said a constructive
word to me, that I recall.

Then there was the physical ABUSE

One person was in charge - Marian GERRON.
she was there, running the Home virtually alone
(not working, we did that) for 26 years. She
had no holidays while I was there only a day
off per week. She eventually was given a medallion for
"services to the Church" I believe.

The ^{PERSON} person from the Church in charge was
Rev P.W. PEARSON (later the Moderator General of the
Presbyterian Church of Australia I believe) who came
constantly (the only person who came without
notice, as I recall) - but who never once
commented on our obvious distress or said a
kind word.

Please see the enclosed pages which I
managed to "steal" (I have the aged pages here)
in 1950 and carried with me and showed them
to the Enquiry (the Forde Enq) in 1999. No one
was interested. No one SAID they believed me.
I saw no-one from the Home after I left.

knowing no better

Children's visitors were not encouraged - They were allowed only into the grounds 2-5pm twice a month and discouraged about taking us out ("not settling down") - I had no visitors, (with the exception of once when I was ill at age 10) for 8 years.

As you will see from the pages I enc - it was a closed shop. Outside staff were got rid of after the complaint of 1939 and the children then saw the Home, with the exception of 2 covered, mute women. - everyone was frightened out of their wits.

The physical abuse was - I cannot see how no-one died. There were limbs broken - black eyes -

Matron used to beat us up and BELT us each morning with a copper stick particularly (a balley stick used to stir heavy wet clothes in a "copper" or boiler - no refrigerator or washing machine until the later years) -

on winter mornings our little hands fingers were dreadfully painful. I cannot understand how no teacher came to our rescue - still.

she grabbed by the hair, she swung, she punched (in the back under clothes usually, sometimes she fought since the black eyes, swollen lips) she rained blows (often on the ankles when our socks) - she kicked with pointed shoes when downed - she literally could knock your teeth out.

Her main "thing" was to make us stand with our hands in the air (see enclosed from a book I have written)

But always she belittled, called us dirty names

I went through 10½ years of HELL, of constant unending stress, of TERROR from which I never recovered. Though I survived I am not able to form relationships. I fear and mistrust at all times - a sad and lonely life of lost potential.

After going to the Q'da Forde Enquiry I tried to sue - of course the Q'da got ^{SOA} KNOWN there was a statute of ~~limited~~ Limitations, I didn't. The consequence, I feel, was more ABUSE - a lifetime of ABUSE.

I cannot tell everything perfectly - too time consuming the best I can do. I would be prepared to give evidence.

I feel a National Enquiry - "exposing a shameful past", is a MUST. My mother was teaching me piano, I could read and write as a little one! My mother's memory (all I had) has stood by me. I feel I was naturally intelligent and COULD HAVE done well, given just a little chance.

I have "lived on the edge of society", the Church having "destroyed" my life - definitely (and the State who should have checked.) I was not a state child. My father paid ~~for~~ board for me. A lot of money was made from the likes of us.

Betsy Alderson

B. FASHDOWN