

War Time Evacuee Fostered at Linnwood Hall - 1943

The add in the paper – it asked anyone connected with Linnwood Hall to contact the person printed in the add. It could be either staff or girls who had been sent to this girl's home in Guildford. Memories came flooding back; I had only spent 3 weeks there but 3 weeks of hell it was as far as I was concerned. Last Sunday was open day and my granddaughter volunteered to drive me down. We were asked to take a plate, so off we went with 2 plates of sandwiches and a map book to find our way to Byron Street Guildford. The house had been a beautiful very big home, built in 1891. It was huge with lots of separate additions, a long drive led back on the block, the gardens had been neglected but the remains of a pond and fountain sat in the front of the house, and a rotunda of sorts over to the left. All I could remember was the long drive.

Why was I left here, in a home for girls, knowing no one and not one word said to me about where I was being dumped? My granddaughter asked how I felt at the age of 13 yrs- numb was all I could think of, I must have been terrified, I remember meeting the boss of the establishment and remember the bed I slept in with a row of similar beds on both sides of this large dormitory I can still hear the crying of most of the girls, including me at night.

I was a war time evacuee from the UK, I had been living at Bankstown, when I was picked up by a child welfare officer and told I was going to a new home, why why why, I am searching for the answers now in 2003 60 years later. I thought I was happy at Bankstown, and when the Brown family found out that I was in this home they threatened to tell my story to the newspapers. I was supposed to go to the Smith family at Pymble but there was a problem and they were not ready to take on the care of a 13-year-old girl for a few weeks. The son of the Smith family, their only child was a pilot and was missing over Germany and they were anxious to know if he had survived. He did and became an assistant to some diplomat in Canberra. I never met him, as I did not stay long at the Smith residence.

So I landed at Linnwood Hall, and as I walked around the rooms, I recognised the kitchen, one of quite a few, this brought back memories of picking out the weevils from the custard. We walked around the huge hall, which had been the dining room, silence was the order of the day, and if you talked at the table punishment would follow. This could be scrubbing or polishing the floor of this huge hall. I must have done something because I can remember lining up with about 4 other girls and scrubbing that floor.

School ?? Did it exist, we attended a classroom and the only thing I did for the time spent at the hall was to do precis, summarising a passage from a book into our own words. So three weeks of schoolwork were wasted. In my school life I have landed at the bottom of the class but also ended 2nd top in my final year (Third form). That was the year I returned to the UK without finishing my exams.

Church was compulsory, but it was enough to turn anyone off church, Have you ever sat through the Litany with a minister that stuttered, sure made a long session of the service. Did this affect me, yes all the happenings at the hall has some affect on me. We sing the hymn Holy Holy Holy, Lord God Almighty and even 60 years later I remember where I first learnt that hymn. With the girls from Linnwood Hall, after being marched along the road to Church.

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We found the solitary cells, outside the main building near the laundry, the window was larger than I remember, but it had wire on the outside, a young blonde girl had absconded and been brought back about the time I arrived, later I managed to get a peek into the cell. A room about 10 ft x 5ft, a mattress on the floor. I took a photo of this room, but had been told to close the door and check the back of it. The door had been lined with some metal and bruising of this metal showed up the dints inflicted by the girls in their terror of being locked up, on their own, away from the rest of us. Can you imagine the affect it would have on young girls?

I met some of these girls, not from the 1943 time, they were mainly those who had been there in the 1960's, they were hoping to have met the "boss" of their days but she had died a few months ago. How they would have liked to take her down to the cells and give her a piece of her own treatment. They were laughing about the times of punishment after running away, it is funny looking back, but behind the laughter was a terrible sadness. Their childhood had been stolen from them, the girls had spirit, which still showed, they had been state wards, nothing really bad, but treating people as numbers without feelings just is not the way to go. I hope from the Senate inquiry that is happening some thought will be given to kids who find themselves in these situations in the future.

I was taken to Pymble and this could have had far more serious consequences than Linnwood Hall. Mr. Smith would take me into his den and cuddle me and kiss me. I reported this to my brother who was 3 years older than I was and he was able to get me moved to Northwood where I joined the Edwards family and was the happiest, Aunty Lill was a better mother to me than my own and after returning to UK. 4 years later I returned to them, until I was married.

Were we a novelty to have when we first arrived in Australia, but the cost of feeding, clothing an extra member in the family might have proved too much? The welfare inspectors always visited us and spoke to our foster parents, but I never remember them ever asking for my opinion. We were placed with strangers; we could not speak up or complain. I kept my thoughts to myself, is that the reason I cannot express my love to others, fortunately I married into a family with 3 girls and they have always accepted as being one of them. My husband constantly told me he loved me, but had to ask me if I loved him and my answer was you should know after 50 years. I realise those words need to be said.

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