

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

10<sup>th</sup> December 2003

**Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care**

I submit my personal story to form part of the Senate Inquiry and give permission for this information to be made public. I welcome this opportunity to speak on a matter that has oppressed me throughout my life with the intention to heal some of the psychological damage.

Past abuse not only impacts on the victim but also generations that follow. It is my hope that this inquiry gives acknowledgment to the harm done to children and that the broader social factors of this injustice will be brought to light.

## **Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care**

### **Personal Story**

I was the second to be born in my family.

In all there were four of us children and I was the only girl and the only one to be sent into Institutional care.

As the only girl at home I got to mop up the blood after violent parental fights and try to care for my younger brothers when my mother was not capable.

We lived next door to a nunnery and Catholic Church and yet these religious people never tried to help us neglected children. The Law let my Father bash my Mother saying they could not interfere in domestic fights. By the time I was twelve I had attempted suicide as a way out.

We were a family of six people living in a one-bedroom house that did not have proper sanitation or water to the house. School medical check-ups revealed that a younger brother had a hole in his heart (leaking aorta) and that the other suffered severe asthma. I was sick to the stomach a lot of the time and suffered migraine headaches.

The two younger brothers are now deceased, as is my Mother.

I recently obtained my Mother's hospital records that consisted of thirteen admissions to Psychiatric hospitals for her chronic drinking problems.

My father was also an alcoholic, cruel and violent.

I missed a lot of school as a result of his attacks against my mother and myself.

School offered no safer ground and I was regularly punished there. This consisted of six lashings on each hand with a cane. Ashamed of what went on at home, I never spoke out against my parents nor do I remember ever being asked was there anything wrong.

In my first year of high school I was expelled due to my truancy.

As a result of the endless violence that occurred I would run away from home.

This resulted in me being charged with delinquency and exposed to moral danger.

I was taken into custody on three accounts and the last time I was committed to The Parramatta Girls Home. I am currently waiting on my archive file from DOCS to know the exact dates.

Parramatta Girls Home was a traumatic experience and compounded the abuse I had already suffered in my young life. I was not given any schooling there.

There was no privacy at any time. We had to stand naked sometimes twice a day so that our bodies could be inspected. I was often humiliated by the people in charge and never asked about my life or circumstances. There was no counselling or any offer to help us understand what was happening.

Against my will, my long hair was all cut off on admittance. We were treated with disdain and made to feel like criminals, constantly told there would be no hope for our kind. I gained a lot of weight in six months, as food was all there was to look forward to. As I was terrified of being sent to Hay from Parramatta, I kept to myself and made no friends, nor did I trust anyone to be friends with. As a result of my internment in Parramatta Girls Home my trust in people was destroyed and I become severely depressed and secretly wanted to die.

My experience with the Welfare System, Police Officers and The Courts left me feeling that there could be no help and that I didn't matter anyway. The compounded effects of childhood neglect and abuse has damaged all aspects of my being. I have carried the internalised stigma of being a "Parramatta Girl" all my life.

On reflection into what happened to children in care, it has become obvious to me that we were from lower socio-economic and troubled backgrounds. I note that the majority of children sent to Institutions were taken from black families or from poor white families, otherwise known as the poor white trash.

Some of us may have developed acute Psychiatric conditions and some may have succumbed to suicide.

It is my firm wish to speak up at The Senate Inquiry into Children In Institutional Care for those that are no longer able to tell their story.