

My memories of nine months between 14/1/55 and 1/10/55 at Parramatta Girls Training School are fear, shame, depression, solitary confinement, desolation, lost, physical, mental and sexual abuse.

My crime, as it was then called, was classified as 'exposed to moral danger', a charge used successfully by Child Welfare authorities when cases became too difficult to resolve.

Why did I spend nine months at Parramatta? My turbulent days commenced at age 12 when I discovered by accident I was adopted at three weeks of age. The shock was so great that even to this day those feelings of anger, hatred and confusion still remain with me. The next three years were wasted, schooling was badly affected, no interest in anything, my burning drive was to eventually find my birth mother. My adopted parents insisted I leave school at age 15 and find a job. Child Welfare officers visited the home from the time I discovered the adoption for the next four years, sometimes I was taken to interviews with Dr. Irene Sebire at Camperdown. Never at anytime was the effect of discovering my adoption linked to my rebellious behaviour.

Constantly being told by my adopted parents 'you are bad, you have bad blood just like your mother' reinforced my bad behaviour.

My adopted father told me that they had picked me up out of the gutter and I would end up back in the gutter.

I found a good job, made friends and began to enjoy life away from home. However, my adopted parents did not approve of my behaviour, which to me was normal.

What more could these people do to me - constantly told I was bad, would turn out like my mother who was also bad.

So at age 17 I left home, lived at my boyfriend's home together with his mother, father, sister and brother. This ended abruptly when the police arrived with a Child Welfare Officer and was arrested charged with Exposed to Moral Danger.

So now I really was a bad person, no-one wanted me and I was to spend the next nine months at Parramatta. Deep down I knew I wasn't a bad person, I was confused, frightened, filled with hatred, so very sad and now all alone.

The rattling of keys still ring in my ears, that long walk along the covered walk way usually resulted in a bashing, open hand slap to the head, sometimes closed fist to the body where it did not show because 'one did not toe the line'. The subject of showers is still too painful to talk about and then the final abuse - sexual - by 'Dr. Finger' as he was known to all the girls. Obviously he could get away with this as he was not a member of staff, but a visiting doctor.

To identify this monster is impossible. His face was hidden behind a white mask, white covering on his head and in the very dull light in sick bay and wearing a white gown, on three occasions carried out digital examinations on me. No nurses were present. Two digital examinations I vividly remember took place after time allowed out of the home on day release.

After this evil defilement of my body, I suffered great fear and nightmares. I was at the total mercy of whatever these so-called human beings perpetrated upon me.

We now know that child abuse has been perpetrated for many, many years in orphanages, schools, religious orders and other places, but now we must expose the evil that was perpetrated upon us at Parramatta, how can we ever forget, let alone forgive.

I have kept this secret to myself for over 57 years, living as two identities, to my friends, business colleagues, community leaders, the 'pillar of society', yet always felt ashamed of my time spent at Parramatta and the thought of being a bad person still lingers.

Would my friends have understood my shame, would they have understood I was not a bad person, would they have understood my hatred and fear of authority, would they have understood my fear to trust, would they have understood the mental and physical abuse I endured at Parramatta, would they have understood? Would they have understood my years of depression and need of medication?

Do the authorities (DOCS) today understand our pain? I am not convinced they do, particularly after attending a 'so called reunion' at Parramatta.

Can we forget? NO. Can we forgive? NO.

You can't see my pain, but I can see the pain in the eyes of Parramatta girls I have recently met. It is still there.

I hope and pray that some day we can be released from the hatred, anger, abuse and irreparable damage we have suffered in silence for so long.

We were not bad then and we are not bad now.

Let me remind you of the Indian saying "WALK IN MY SHOES FOR 40 DAYS".

*Denise Dravine.*

Denise Dravine.

Postal Address - [faded text]

I shall be attending the Senate Enquiry to be held on the 3rd and 4th February.