

Parliament Abuse - Canberra ACT 2600

I was born in NSW in 1946. At the age of 13 I ran away from home, consequently as a result of this action I was charged by police as being "exposed to moral danger." I was given a 12 months good behavior bond and was placed in the care of my parents - I did not stay under their guardianship as again I was apprehended and the same charge applied. So at 14, I was sent to Tempe, a catholic institution run by the nuns, for a period of 9 months. While I was not physically abused in this home I feel the hard work we had to do everyday in the laundry was unacceptable. Surely education would have been a better option. I left there in 1962, now aged 15.

The years 1963, 1964, 1965, would see me at Parramatta girls Home, again I was 'exposed to moral danger', and was also deemed to be 'uncontrollable'. Parramatta was a whole new ball game. Rules were very strict and we had to march everywhere. My main problem with my own personal time spent in Parramatta was the amount of times I was locked in isolation and detention, these times are too numerous to recall. Maybe they did see me as an 'uncontrollable' child but isolation was, and still is, a cruel and inhuman punishment. There were times in the detention block when there was no access to toilets or water and the lack of these basic rights caused even more unnecessary pain and trauma.

We were roughly handled and treated as we were worth nothing. There was a total lack of respect for 'women's' problems. At that time of the month we were handed 4 maddess pads a day. Toothpaste was put on our brushes for us in case we used too much, toilet paper, was it 3 or 4 squares at a time? Soap? Must have been

some because we did get a whole 2 minutes for a shower. That in itself I found extremely degrading, all lined up naked, holding a towel in front trying to preserve some measure of dignity: 6 in 6 out. No, there were no doors on the showers!

And all that endless scrubbing of the walkway, what was that all about?

I left Parramatta aged 18 and with not one positive thought in my head. A deep rage and hatred for any authority figure was forever embedded in me. I am now 57 years of age and still feel this same rage and mistrust! Because of these feelings my life in the workplace, socially, anywhere, has been very difficult.

I mean, these people were not even trained to look after us, they were just public servants who had worked their way up the ladder, or down the ladder, which ever way you might want to look at it. Who gave them the power to totally disrespect us and treat us as they did?

I believed that we went to Parramatta to lose our freedom, not also our dignity and self respect. It's a perfect example of seeing what happens when 'Power' is put into the hand of untrained or unskilled people. When this happens, someone has to pay - and it will always be the underdog.

I was 18 years old when I left Parramatta, within about 6-8 weeks I was in Long Bay Jail with a 2 year sentence for Break, Enter & Steal - (I had taken some clothes & a small amount of cash.) - which does not excuse the fact that I had broken the law - but 2 years? Here again was the issue of isolation - I spent a

3.

lot of time in the 'lock-up' and for every day the visiting Justice of the Peace sentenced you to bread and water, you had to spend a week in the yard being a concrete area totally surrounded by bars, including the roof. Consequently 3 days bread and water also meant 3 weeks detention - extremely soul destroying - no books - no human contact, no future - There was no light ahead. By this stage of my life I was completely institutionalised and I could not fathom there could be a life outside of prison.

When I did leave Long Bay I was only out 3-4 weeks. I travelled to Victoria and with another person did enter someones house and took a quantity of Avon products - The result was to see the next 3 years in Fairlea Female Prison. I was actually sentenced before the high court, because I had been in so much trouble - The judge said that 'obviously, I was nothing but a public nuisance'. I believe that in these days sentences were based on English law - 3 adult jail terms and you were deemed a 'habitual criminal' - which then meant how ever petty the crime you could still be given what was known as 'the key' - a sentence no less than 7 years.

At Fairlea I was to live in the Isolation Block for 3 years simply because they did not know what to do with me. In the latter part of this time I was allowed to work in the laundry during the day but had to sleep in

4

The isolation block of a night, and so it went. After 2 years I was moved back into the mainstream prison to serve the remainder of my sentence. With only weeks to go before my parole date, I 'went over the wall', in the early hours of one morning. So back to solitary for another 6 months.

Came the time to be released; was I rehabilitated? Was I ready to face society? Definitely not. From the ages 13-23 I had spent only 10 months on the outside. Basically I was still 13-15 years old mentally and emotionally. I had not grown up at all. So with no life skills, no money and no hope I left Fairstea and reentered society.

I was never to go back to jail again - I do not put this down to either good luck or good management - but to the birth of my first beautiful daughter who gave me hope simply by her love and dependence. (She was born 12 months after my release - the marriage did not last). Eventually I was to have 2 more similar beautiful daughters and today they are grown, are good outstanding citizens, with great prospects for the future. I am married for the 3rd time and my husband and I live in relative peace.

Our children and grandchildren must never experience the isolation and separation that children in care experienced in my day. Injustice to one child is an injustice to every child. If children are not given love and

respect when they are young - how can they be
expected to give it back when they are grown
too late - The damage is done!