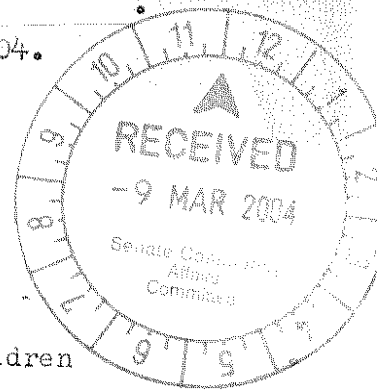


5th March 2004.

The Secretary,
Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee,
S 159,
PARLIAMENT HOUSE,
CANBERRA. ACT 2600.



Dear Sir/Madam,

Submission to Senate Inquiry into Care of Children
in Institutions.

I wish to make a submission, as above, by recounting my own experience as a child in the children's home conducted by the, then, Methodist Church, i.e. Dalmar Children's Home.

My natural mother signed a document giving me into the care of the Methodist Church, so that I was legally a ward, not long after my birth in 1924. I understand I was first cared for in the Dalmar Home in Ashfield, and subsequently at Dalmar, Carlingford.

Understandably I have no recollection of my infant days, but at re-unions in my mature years, of "Dalmar Old Girls' and Boys' Union", have met the person who helped look after me in the "Infants' Cottage" at Dalmar, Carlingford, and experienced an instant warm rapport with her. In conversation with her, I gained the impression she enjoyed helping to look after the infants, as a young woman in her middle and later teens, and that there was a happy atmosphere in the infants' cottage.

My girlhood recollections are of happy days, both during school periods and during school holidays.

As children we were permitted, indeed encouraged, to play folk, chanting, team games -- some I know of ancient historical origin, and competitive team running games, and a happy feature of these, was that small children were always welcome to participate with the older boys and girls. On long, hot summer evenings the children were allowed to stay up longer, to play these singing games till dusk. The children organised these activities themselves, the older ones passing on the rules and songs of the games, to the younger ones as they became old enough to be allowed to join in.

I only recall the Sisters being agreeable when the children stayed out playing later on hot summer nights, although it did mean their working day was prolonged.

When episodes of children's infectious ailments, such as measles, meant numbers of children were housed in the "Hospital Cottage", my recollection is of loving kindness. During such times the Sister looking after the ailing children in the Cottage ward, cheerfully allowed the girls to make rag dolls of the cloths necessarily provided, although that meant extra ones needed to be supplied. I think my positive interest in dress making could stem from the impromptu doll and dress making times then, while happily bed-ridden.

Submission from Enid McIlraith (contd)

I wish to refer to the "duties" that as children we were expected to fulfill. From about 8 or 9 the girls on the weekend spent part of Saturday morning polishing the dormitory floor, and the staircase from the first floor.

I cite these as the tasks I was personally involved in.

We did the work, but with a spirit of fun, as we would slide on our kneeling cloths, on our backs, under the beds, having "up-side-down" faces as we polished, and when polishing the staircase, propelled ourselves down the stairs, bump, bump, bump on our bottoms, on the polishing cloths.

In retrospect, I am sure the Sisters knew we made joyous our "duty" times, and did not interfere, to stop our fun or the laughter.

During my childhood I do recollect other children weeping bitterly when they had been brought to stay at Dalmar, because of the death of a parent, usually the mother, or children brought to be cared for during the depression when an out-of-work father could no longer endure the privation for the children.

The sad children settled in, and made friends, and three of my best friends at Dalmar, sisters brought to be care for, for what became a few years, kept in touch in their later years, with friends in the "Dalmar Old Girls' and Boys' Union".


I left Dalmar at the age of 10 years, in the foster care of a courageous Methodist woman.

When I qualified for my first week's paid annual leave, at the age of 17 years, my foster parent agreed to my request to spend the week at Dalmar, among the girls and young women with whom I had grown up, and with the Sisters who had nurtured me during my childhood.

Some years back I joined with members of the Old Girls' and Boys' Union for Christmas re-unions, at Dalmar, and felt enriched to be there again, and meet men and women, whom I had shared happy childhood days.

In conclusion, I believe my days at Dalmar were made happy because of the leadership of Matron Helliwell, the loving care of the Sisters, the encouragement to the children to be "inclusive" of every age group.

Faithfully,


(Mrs.) (Enid McIlraith)
nee Lovell.