

INSECURITY

My sister & I were sent to Bidura Girls Home on or around 4 December, 1957. Our clothing was removed & put on a rack for anyone to share. I was 10 years old & had to sleep in a cot with another girl because the beds were full & there was nowhere else to sleep.

After a short period at the home I was sent to Camperdown Children's Hospital have my tonsils removed. Other children had their mothers visit & stay with them all day but I had no one with me. I recall one mother giving me an ice cream, which I thought, was very kind. The nurse gave me a tablet & I chewed it (she did not advise me to swallow it). From that day until I was well into adulthood I had trouble taking medication. When I had tablets to take I would always reflect back to my experience as a child chewing instead of swallowing & could taste the bitterness in my mouth. I now know that this was a fear, which surfaced through my insecurity as a child in the hospital with no one to nurture or love me.

SELF ESTEEM

When at Bidura my first job was to make all the cots. I then progressed onto bed making. On my first day I made all the beds in the ward & on the verandah. unbeknown to me the nurse on duty was following me & stripping every bed that had the sheet on the wrong way. When I say wrong way, the hem had to be facing downward.

After completing the beds the Nurse pointed to a pile of sheets, which she had taken off the beds. She then showed me the way she wanted the beds to be made i.e. with the hems facing down. Why couldn't she have explained this before I made every bed? I was by now becoming institutionalized & asked very little questions. I remade every bed the correct way. Today I always check the position of the hem before making any bed. I.e. perfection by now I had very little self-esteem & was quite shy when asked any questions (fear of failure).

J. B. ...

FAMILY/HOME

My mother came to visit my sister & I, the following weekend after our removal from her care. That was to be the last time we ever saw her. By the time I felt confident enough to look for her she had died. So you see I not only lost my home but my family.

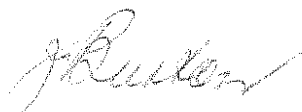
My mother was married to Edward Aquilina & he was killed in the Second World War. They had one son Michael Aquilina.

My mother entered a defacto relationship with my father (Charles Edward Kilroy) with the result, 3 children. I am the eldest of these children. In today's society my father would have been given counseling & guidance to help relieve his fears, which impacted on his decisions to abscond from his duties in the Army. (Post traumatic stress disorder). What I can recall of my dad was he was a gentle, kind person & the possible thought of killing or harm to others would have reflected on his coping ability. My father was wounded in action yet was never given any recognition of such. I recall going to the Anzac marches & proudly waving the Australian flag when my Dad marched (proudly) down the streets of Sydney.

I was extremely disappointed when I received his military papers (2003) stating he was not entitled to service or war medals. I have not told any member of my family of my findings as I feel very humiliated and maybe disillusionment towards the systems. Where was the help for my mother & father when things were not working out for them or their families? Two returned soldiers, four children & an insecure future. Where did the systems fail to recognize the needs of war widows & returned soldiers?

When I came home from hospital after having my tonsils out my sister was no longer in the girl's home. When I enquired I was just told she had gone somewhere else. That was it; no other information or explanation was given to me regarding the whereabouts of my sister. I did not see my sister again until after I started working.

When at Bidura Girl's Home we walked to the pictures some Saturday afternoons. On at least two occasions I can recall seeing my brother John walking along the footpath on the opposite side of the road & I would wave to him. This was to be the only time I saw him after removal from the courthouse for 10 years. I made contact & met him on the night prior to my wedding. My older brother did not come back on the scene until early eighties.



IDENTITY

I became very regimental from an early age due to the institutional care. That is everything had a routine time, purpose & response. I can understand now, systems were required for everything to flow but I really lost my identity as myself. I was a puppet within a disciplined system (a child needs love & nurturing in learning to accept understanding & friendship).

Not long after I came home from having my tonsils removed I was sent to a foster home at Bass Hill. The family was Mr. & Mrs. Costello. They insisted on me calling them Mum & Dad. This was very uncomfortable for me at first but I became used to it. Mr. Costello was a rather stern man & said very little except when in the form of discipline. Mrs. Costello was a lovely lady & was good to me. They had three sons living at home Billy, Bruce & Barry. I went to school at Chester Hill Primary School.

I didn't have much to do with the two older boys as they were working & not at home very much. I cannot remember the name of the younger boy the most significant thing I do remember was being sexually abused by him. I will call him Barry (he was 15 when I went there & I was 10). My bedroom was a room at the back of the house close to the back door. Most mornings Barry would come into my room & insist I go with him. I never resisted him, as I didn't know how to say "No". This became a pattern of which I despised & would often pretend to be asleep but he was persistent until I went with him. Barry would take me down to the garage & lie me on the floor & remove my panties. He would lie on top of me & rub his penis on my genitals. I had no knowledge of the facts of life (sexual education) at this stage in my life (that was the terminology used in those days). Barry never hurt me throughout my ordeals with him.

When we watched television Barry always sat on the lounge with a rug over him. He then started to share the rug with me, this was another way he sexually abused me. Barry would then fondle my genitals with his fingers & no one was aware of this abuse under the rug. I never told anyone nor spoke about it until after my marriage.

Mrs. Costello asked me if I wanted to have a friend from the girl's home to come and live for company. She arranged for a girl I was friendly with to come & live with us. I cannot recall her name but I think it may have been Lorraine. I don't recall having much to do with Lorraine when she did come to live. Lorraine was older than me. I had my eleventh birthday whilst living there.

When I look back now I can recall the sexual abuse declined after Lorraine came to live. (Maybe it shifted to her).

J. B. Costello

IDENTITY (continued)

I started to steal some coins (halfpenny to a shilling) from a drawer in Mrs. Costello's bedroom. I would take the money to school & buy lollies for my friends. I eventually was caught & Mrs. Costello told me that Mr. Costello would give me a belting with a strap when he came home from work. I was so scarred of Mr. Costello that I did not come home from school that afternoon. I wandered around the streets & stayed at my friend's house until it was dark. I eventually went home & all I can remember was being yelled at. I do not remember whether I got that belting from Mr. Costello.

It wasn't long after that that both Lorraine & I were sent back to the girl's home. A very insecure girl was I, by now. A lady came to me not long after my return to Bidura & asked me if I would like to go to Newcastle to live. Where or what I was moving to was never explained nor discussed. I agreed to the move as I was very naïve & unsure of myself.

When I arrived at King Edward Girls Home in Darby Street Newcastle around December 1958 I was told that I couldn't be called by my name as there was already a girl called Joan in the home. I was then told my name would be Isabelle (loss of identity). I was never happy with the name change but accepted it as another rule & regulation.

NURTURE

There were around 28 girls in this home, a lot smaller than Bidura. My first encounter in the dining room was when I left a glass of milk untouched. I was told to sit back down at the table & drink the milk. I never liked milk & my mother always sent notes to school to exclude me from having to drink the daily bottles of milk given to each student. I was forced to drink this milk at the home. I was also told that no one leaves the table until they have eaten everything on their plates and there was no talking in the dining room.

A nurse was on duty to supervise the dining room every mealtime. I hated meal times as I was a small eater & my plate was always over loaded compared to my eating habits. We were given porridge most mornings for breakfast. (I have never eaten porridge again since leaving the home). One morning I plucked up enough courage to tell the nurse on duty about the weevils floating around my plate. All the girls accepted the weevils as part of their daily diet. The nurse came over to me & put her face close to my bowl and said "where". I can still recall those words & tone as clear as the day they were said. I just picked them out & placed the weevils around the side of my bowl. I never mentioned the weevils again & joined the rest of the gang with having to put up with the weevil diet in my plate.

J. Butler

NURTURE (continued)

Another time I can recall a girl vomiting on her plate & she still had to eat her meal. I was usually the last one finished my meal each day. One night I was really bursting (full) & still had some mashed potato to finish. I was the only one left in the dining room this night. I asked the nurse if I could leave it. I was told that if I left the mashed potato I would be given it for breakfast. I accepted this & left the mashed potato (about the circumference of a poached egg & about one & half inches high). The next morning when I walked into the dining room my plate was piled high with all the left over potato from the evening meal before (not just what I had left). My eyes swelled up with tears but I was not allowed to leave the dining room until it was all finished. Actually my eyes still swell with tears when speaking about many experiences from those Girls Home days. They have scarred me deeply. There was no one to talk to about how you felt or the victimization that went on. I can also recall the youngest girl in the home (5 years old) getting the cane for some trivial thing. I personally can recall this happening on several occasions. I never did receive this cane myself.

Bath time was very humiliating for the older girls who were developing or had started to menstruate. Every one would get undressed & line up naked to wait for the bath. If you had your periods then you were given the last bath before the water was changed. The nurse would call out "anyone for the last bath" all the girls new what this meant. Where was our dignity respected? I cannot recall how many persons had a bath before the water was changed. When we removed our underwear it was given to the nurse on duty to inspect & if it was soiled you received a clean set otherwise the same ones were worn again the next day. The inspections were done in front of the other girls waiting in line & were very humiliating for me.

I started my periods when in this home & a nurse took me into a room & her explanation was "you can not have a baby until you start to menstruate". That was my sex education explanation. This was an important part of my growth & I was not given any nurturing or education to help me through the teen years. All I was given was a cake of sunlight soap to wash my undies out if I had any bloodstains on them.

One of my jobs was to polish & buff the lino floor of the bedroom where the nurses slept overnight. One morning I had completed my job & was waiting for the nurse to come and inspect it so that I could get ready for school. The rule was that all jobs had to be completed before anyone was allowed to go to school. We all walked in a line (pairs) to The Junction Primary School from the girl's home under the supervision of a staff member.

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PROTECTION

When the nurse came to inspect my job she got down on her hands & knees & put her head sideways to look at the polished floor. It was really shiny. I had manually rubbed polish all over the lino then rubbed & shined it with another cloth. The nurse showed me how to check if I had missed any spots. She showed me where I had missed rubbing the polish off in one spot (about 4 to 5 inches in diameter). The nurse told me I had to re do the floor because I had missed this spot. I was not mature enough at the time to just buff up that section (when in reality is all I needed to do). So I did as I was told & started again. I felt very humiliated as all the girls were waiting to go to school & I was holding them up. I finally completed the floor again & was allowed to go to school.

Another time I had been naughty (I can not recall what I had done but certainly have never forgotten the punishment). I was locked in a walk in closet for the day. There was no window or light on in this room. I sat in the dark on the floor all day. I can recall a tray being brought & placed on the floor (lunch) & slid along to where I was sitting cross-legged. I think the door was left open for me to eat my lunch (not 100% sure) before being closed again. I was let out for the evening meal. The door opened onto a courtyard it was next to out locker room.

On some Sunday afternoons we were allowed into the recreational room where we would sit & sew. No conversation was allowed in this room, we sat in silence. I became very suppressed with the lack of nurture & communication given to me. This created a major problem for me when I became an adult. Lack of experience in problem solving.

So you see I was programmed to systems from an early age.

At Christmas I was given a doll & this was taken from me & put into a locked storage room & maybe once a month the room was unlocked on a Sunday afternoon & the girls were allowed to play with them. I loved to play with this doll because I called it Beverley after my sister who I was missing.

Other than school we had very little contact with the community therefore creating a lack of social skills. We attended church every week.

Another time I recall was most Saturday afternoons we were allowed to go to the picture show at The Junction. I had a sore on my face or forehead & a nurse told me many times that if I still had the sore I would not be going to the pictures with the other girls. This made me feel inferior & unloved.

In or around September 1959 I was sent to another foster home at Wallsend. This time I was the only child. Mr. West had grown children (he was older than Mrs. West) & she had no children at all. They enrolled me under their name at school so I now became Joan West. (Loss of identity). They also asked me to call them Mum & Dad. I commenced another school, Wallsend Primary School. I was 12 by now & had repeated 5th class due to all the movement in such a short time.

J. B. Weston

PROTECTION (continued)

Mr. & Mrs. West would often have arguments (mainly late at night after I was asleep) & the shouting would wake me up. I would pretend to be asleep by just laying or staying in bed. They would often comment on me being such a good sleeper, when in fact I was simply withdrawing to protect myself.

The interrupted sleep patterns did affect my schooling & attitude to specific incidents. I was reasonably happy in their care. They were very fond of me although they did not show it openly.

One day I went to visit a girl friend & she was over the back at her neighbours. I walked over there to see her & she had just gone up the shop with the lady & children who lived there. I was asked to come inside by the father who took me into the lounge room. I was waiting for my friend to come back from the shop. The man walked over to me (I had shorts on) & pulled the waist of my shorts open & put his hand down my pants. I did not resist, as I did not know how to handle this man. My fear resurfaced of the sexual abuse whilst living with the Costello's. I had my period so he soon retreated. I never went back to that place nor did I ever tell anyone of this incident. I heard a few years later that this man had died & I was relieved. I felt the need for someone to protect me from the type of people who abused my vulnerability & innocence. I was so suppressed I just thought I didn't have the right to say how I felt. (A similar feeling when the nurses (in the home) over ruled my needs or ignored my feelings). Similar incidents have happened to me all throughout my adult life. Although I am a lot stronger today than I have ever been.

SOCIALISATION

I found it very hard to socialize in groups as I never new how to communicate to people. I would always just sit around & say very little in case I said the wrong thing. This also applied in school, as I was afraid to join in conversations for fear of rejection. Reflection of nurse's attitudes towards me in the girl's home.

My foster mother went through the depression & was out of work until she was 18. When I was in 2nd year in high school I was offer4ed a job in a news agency. Mrs. West insisted I take the job instead of finishing school. She was reflecting on how hard it was for her to get a job when she left school therefore it was her need for me to take up this offer. So once again I did as I was told & left school & started to work.

I started to have a social life with some girl friends & Mrs. West kept telling me she didn't want me going out with my friends that she got me for company for her. So I became more suppressed & was afraid to ask to go anywhere. My closest friend would ask Mrs. West herself if I could go to social events & most times I was allowed. When I enquired about going somewhere I was always given the third degree with an occasional result.

J. R. West

SOCIALISATION (continued)

I met my future husband at a family wedding (west/burton).

I was married in 1967 at the age of 20. I have four children. They are now all adults with families of their own.

COMMUNICATION

During my early parenting days I had little or no support from anyone with child rearing. So of course I disciplined my children the only way I knew. Strict discipline was the only thing I knew well. Well this only caused my children to rebel as teenagers. They all have had drug problems from time to time with one son being in constant incarceration due to his criminal offences that were necessary for him to feed his own & his partners drug habits.

Since all the trouble I had with my own children I enrolled at Tafe & completed many courses to self educate myself in community welfare issues (including drug & alcohol). This education has helped me understand my own learned behavior patterns, which severely impacted on my children's life.

My grandson (who is now 9 years old) is living with my husband & I. He has resided with us for 4 ½ years. (his father is in gaol for 4 ½ years). I have applied for custody of him & to date it has cost my husband & I close to \$20,000 in legal fees & we haven't been through the hearing yet. The biggest bill is yet to come.

My elder son has moved to Norfolk Island to escape from his inability to cope with stressful situations. My younger daughter is in a relationship where her partner is an ongoing pot smoker & is dragging her down with his negative lifestyle. Although she has an addictive personality she is strong enough to get herself out of this situation when she finally sees the light. What I see is her learned pattern from my lifestyle of inability to deal with stressful situations.

I have never taken any form of illegal drug nor abused any legal drugs, however I am a work aholic, which carries the same trait (addictive personality).

PRIDE

I have lost my fathers Irish culture & family traditions. I did not know he was from an Irish background until I got his death certificate. His niece completed the death certificate and has put children unknown on this form. So again I have lost my right as a descendant to my own father. He was dead for 10 years before I tracked him down. I have no history or whereabouts of any relations on his side of the family. I lost my pride (when I sent away for his army records) only to find out he was dismissed from the army for too many Awls'. Why wasn't he sent to a psychiatrist to find out his real fears before dismissing him with dishonor? My mother died before I found her & the person she was living with scattered her ashes (my elder brother told me years later) & I have nothing in remembrance of her. This distresses me more than anything. I blamed my mother for my family breakup for many, many years but now I know she was a victim herself.

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PRIDE (continued)

I never ever had the opportunity to say goodbye to either of my parents. They were taken out of my life & circumstances never returned them. I cannot discuss them without breaking into sobbing tears. The tears are actually rolling down my cheeks and I can hardly see the screen of this computer as I am typing. These memories are very painful for me, as I dearly loved both of my parents.

DIGNITY/RESPECT

I do not even know what colour eyes my mother had. My dignity is often challenged when doctors & medical professionals ask questions about my family background. I find it very hard to cope with emotional issues & when I go to any funeral my mind goes to my parents of whom I never had the opportunity to say goodbye. So I am a real mess at funerals. I recall some songs, which my Dad always played but when I hear these songs I usually cry. These types of things have never been released from my mind before. Writing my life experience for this submission has really broken me emotionally as I am reliving all these issues and events.

EDUCATION

If I had the knowledge that I now have I would certainly handle situations differently. Personal development & counselling are certainly a necessary requirement in coping mechanisms. I lost my opportunity to finish my schooling because of someone else's fear. My son is in Long Bay Gaol because I used him as a scapegoat when my own needs were out of control. My sister's son committed suicide last year. My son was raped when boarding at St John of God Morriset (school for emotionally disturbed children). He has tried to commit suicide on several occasions. This is the son who is incarcerated at the moment. I have many thoughts & plans about committing suicide myself from time to time.

CONCLUSION

I feel my mother was an indirect victim of World War 11. Assistance should have been offered to my mother with the up bringing of her four children. My father was good enough to fight for his country & was wounded in action. When he really needed support to deal with his anguish & fears he was neglected & rejected. My children would not have so many hang ups & certainly my grandson would not be living with my husband & I because of failed relationships had I had a secure & protected environment with positive people around me. Had the Government of the day completed their homework there would have been no need for me nor my brother & sister to have been institutionalized. Legacy & Red Cross should be given a list of all children of returned soldiers to prevent any neglect. More education to the general public should be provided to ensue everyone is aware of services available to war widows & returned soldiers. Visits from Legacy & Red Cross should be followed up, as some people will never seek help due to their pride & ego. Without a doubt only trained & educated persons should work with those in foster care or institutions.

I certainly hope my experiences in life do help new systems to be developed & I will be available to assist with setting up new systems for future improvements when/if required.

J. B. B. B.

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