



“The Bird Mc Nair

Get Yourself Over Here”

By

Carol Mc Nair

**I still have the only Christmas present
my mother gave me in 1952; it is a cake
of soap.**

To Whom It May Concern:

I was born in 1938, in a small country town in western NSW, due to a mining accident my father had to come to Sydney to seek medical treatment. I was two years of age, my brother five

After a train trip of approximately 500 miles, in an old railway rattler, my father was admitted to hospital in Sydney. The trip would have been horrific for both parents as my father was very badly injured and my mother, with two small children to attend to as well.

My maternal grandmother took me in and my older brother went to my paternal grandparents, I don't know where my mother was during this time.

So begins my life, from then on I was transferred between whoever could take me. I believe this was the start of many traumas I experienced, what an experience. For the next two and a half years for a little two-year-old in strange places with people she didn't know, ripped away from family.

I met up with my family at approx. four and a half, by then not knowing who they were, ready to start school.

We shared a house with my mother's sister and her husband,

Being the war years lots of wild drunken parties took place at home, it was much worse than the film **ONCE WE WERE WARRIORS**, violence and drunkardness was the norm.

Most times my brother and myself were alone at home, neighbors sometimes fed me and offered odd bits of clothing etc.

When I started high school it was very difficult to keep up attendance, as I did not have the uniform, shoes or equipment required for school. I felt like a misfit and was made to feel that way also. So the only alternative for me was not to attend school at all. I roamed the streets, went swimming at Brighton le Sands or in the lakes at the lakes golf course. Not being able to finish first form, has been a big disadvantage for me throughout my life.

At age twelve, I managed to get a job at a furniture factory in Rosebery, to get some money to survive. No one believed I had a job, until in the institution my parents received a group certificate for me.

One night three men picked me up in the city and after a conversation I mentioned I wanted to earn some money, they said they would let me clean their house. I don't remember what time it was or where I was. After arriving at a railway station in the suburbs, then walking down a dark laneway, one of the men pulled me aside and said, he did not realize how young I was. Then offered me money, and told me to run as fast as I could back to the station and catch a train to the city. All I could think of was what a generous man he was.

Unbeknown to me my father had applied to put me into care, stating I was uncontrollable and suggested I was working as a prostitute, he requested my mother not to be advised as she was suffering a brain tumor and would affect her health. After an investigation, by the child welfare dept. It was decided my home life was unsuitable for a young child. My mother was a severe alcoholic who could only survive on methylated spirits to drink, as that was all she could afford. My father wanted to be rid of me so he could leave and go off with a girlfriend.

My mother died at age 42 with cirrhosis of the liver caused by her alcoholism, my father died in gaol aged 52 yrs, a psychopath and my brother aged 50, and my only sibling committed suicide on Christmas Eve 1985.

I was taken to the children's court in Albion St. Surry Hills. What terror that was for me, girls waiting outside waiting for their hearings to take place, were saying don't go to this home or that home and giving detail descriptions of what would happen to me if I went there. {Not realizing I had no choice.}

After my hearing, which was so frightening for me, with no explanation I was led away to the Girl's Shelter with an officer. Not knowing what was happening or where I was going or for how long.

What an experience for a young shy girl with no self esteem. All the other girls seemed much older than I, worldlier and had been through the system on many occasions. They bullied me to try and steal the butter etc. on the Matron's tray and how the doctor was going to push his hand up me when I was to have my internal medical examination. I was imagining his hand coming out my mouth. Showering and going to the toilet being watched at all times, as there were no doors on any cubicles, being searched at bedtime etc.

Going back to the court, on to Bidura, what an experience. I was shown my bed and table, then left on my own, I lay on the bed crying with fear and confusion not knowing what it was all about. The officer returned a short time later and stated " it's to late for that, get up and come with me".

I was there a few months, when two other girls who had been through the system, suggested we run away. It seemed a good idea at the time. I had no idea where Glebe was, or where or how to go anywhere from there. It was planed to go to Newcastle, where one of the girls had lived with Foster Parents, and insisted they would take us in. We hitched hiked to Newcastle, arriving at a park behind her foster parent's home, the girl was too scared to go up and see these people. It never occurred to me she had been sent back to the Institution by these people.

We spent the night in the toilet in this park, freezing cold and hungry, the next day we went on to the main part of Newcastle, when it started to get dark I was cold, hungry and terrified. I suggested to the others we go to a police station to give ourselves up to police. The police station was one where husband and wife lived on the property. Going inside was a big step for me, but not knowing where I was, cold and hungry, it looked better than where we spent the night before. I explained the situation to the policeman, he told me to go away. After two more attempts to get him to take us in. {I now realize it wasn't his problem} the poor man must have felt sorry for us on third trip back. He eventually took us

in. His wife cooked us some food and gave us some warm blankets; we slept in the cells that night. {It was lovely sure beat Bidura and the park.}

Welfare arrived to escort us back to Bidura by train the next day.

The matron insisted we all get another physical internal examination, even though I was a virgin at The Girl's Shelter not long before. Another examination confirmed I was still a virgin, also she thought I should go to Parramatta Girls Home for running away. Fortunately, the judge thought I did not deserve to go to Parramatta.

About a month later I was sent to Lynwood Hall at Guildford. What a time that was. There is no wonder we have no self-esteem, I can only speak for myself but life was so hard and cruel that as a young pubescent girl I thought I must have dreamt it.

My duties were up at six in the morning, scrub a cement floor where assembly was held numerous times a day. This floor was scrubbed every morning no matter what. Kitchen duty was a treat, as we could steal bread and dripping to eat at night after we finish cleaning up. There was laundry days where we did all the washing by hand, have every garment-examined prior being boiled in the copper, then through the mangle, then out on the lines.

We were schooled in house, with one teacher and a sewing teacher, with girls aged from eleven to eighteen, who were probably more, than likely dysfunctional and certainly lacked learning skills, which require special help.

The class teacher realized we all needed more help, than she could offer, but she tried her hardest to help us, she was the only one I had come across who actually tried to help me, in my time in the institutions.

Sewing lessons were doing embroidery or making ballet dresses for the favorite girls who were chosen by Miss Davis to have ballet lessons

Lynwood Hall was the show place of the Child Welfare Dept. Miss Davis had us working flat our keeping the place in tiptop condition.

After school we did the gardening, on some occasions we were able to steal some strawberries or vegetables, depending on which officer was on duty some were more vigilant than others.

I will always remember breakfast we sat at tables of eight, when we had finished eating our porridge, one of the girls collected all the plates on a tray. An officer inspected the plates, to see if there were any weevils left on our plates, If any were there, the plates were returned to whomever the culprit was, to ensure the person responsible ate them all. No one was game to leave any, as you were placed on punishment.

At recess we had either a half or a quarter piece of fruit, this had to be eaten core and all, till this day I still eat the core and seeds of the fruit.

To me they were minor things, the emotional harm was much worse, visiting day once a month, sitting and waiting all together in the sewing room, listening to the noise on the driveway outside the window, hoping someone would visit me. Sitting there all alone pretending it didn't matter that no one came to see me, this was a common occurrence. After visiting what I thought were the rich girls being ridiculed? Because some girls received too much, or visitors caught a taxi from the station, which was a distance away from Lynwood Hall.

Being called to Miss Davis's office a few times, absolutely terrified me, worried, I was in trouble for something I would be shaking. Then being told, I had a letter from my Grandmother, that was so horrific, she had to destroy it so I couldn't read it. These letters were not on my welfare file, in retrospect, my grandmother was dead by the time I read my file. I assume the letters were about the state my mother and brother were in. My father had left them; my mother was in the most shocking state with her drinking and had been evicted onto the street.

Not knowing what was to happen to me, in my mind I assumed I would spend all my life in Lynwood Hall. No one seemed to want me, I had nowhere to go, and I lived in fear all the time in the institutions. We were considered bad, I had to be bad, we were told we were bad, not worth anything or become anything. To me I had no hope left, I wanted to be dead, so at around thirteen years of age I had heard that the Oleander bushes that grew outside the

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sewing room were poisonous. I ate a hand full of the leaves and sucked the sap from the stalks, feeling happy I was soon to die. I didn't even get sick. What a disappointment still up until today I don't believe they kill you.

The whole time I was in the institutions all I wanted to do was not to be seen, I just wanted to disappear so I wouldn't be singled out. Most of all at Lynwood I didn't want to end up in what we called The Clink, which was a very small room with cement floor no windows a bucket and mattress on the floor.

When the time came to be released was even worse. At fifteen and a half being taken back to Bidura, being led down long corridors a hat being placed on my head, the officer saying "that fits" an overcoat, two jumper and skirts pair of shoes and socks, then out into the world.

What a do you do, when there is no one to tell you, what to do and how to do it.

I was taken to my father's sister's house in Arncliffe. I had no contact with this Aunt since I was a very little girl. There were three younger children than I was, all in one very small room. We just fitted in by using two double-decker bunk beds.

I was so shy I couldn't call her anything the whole time I lived there and didn't know how I managed to be put there, in the first place, but was very grateful she took me in. Later on I found out my father had called in to see her and she had asked about me. He told her I had just been put in to the institution recently. My Aunt was shocked and requested she take me in.

Therefore she must have thought I was very funny, not talking, trying to fit in and not cause her any concern but in retrospect it certainly wasn't an ideal situation.

In the first couple of days my menstrual period commenced. I didn't know how to tell my aunt, I hadn't been provided with anything to use (at Lynwood we used large toweling nappies) the only thing I could use was toilet paper.

In the first week my aunt suggested we look for a job. I was in a state of terror what do you do, how do you do it. Here was this

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little girl thrown out into the world, not knowing the people she was with, or what people talked about, how to catch a bus or train go the pictures etc.

How could the welfare, allow young girls and boys, to go out into the world so institutionalized. We were like little children not knowing how to cope with all the changes. No wonder so many ended back in institutions and gaol there was no preparation for us. I feel the welfare thought that was all we deserved, and would end up there any way, as we were no good.

Well I appeared to everyone to be OK, but what was inside I couldn't share with anyone. I felt no one would believe me.

I am almost sixty six years old, have two grown children, both well educated, good positions, four grandchildren an ex-husband and a good relationship with them all, but I couldn't tell them about my secret past, even now I can't go back to all the horrors. Shame in massive amounts still remains because I must have been so bad.

After about six robberies, the last two extremely violent, which happened about five years ago, I had to have medical treatment. I was suffering Post Traumatic Stress, had to give up my business, as I couldn't cope any more.

During this treatment my childhood surfaced again, I will probably require help for a very long time to come. The Psychiatrist drew, to my attention the large amount of traumas I had been through in my life and had pushed them all down. Especially back to the little two year old being given away, being on the streets with no food or clothing, the institutions, coming out into a world where you are supposed to be an adult, with absolutely no preparation, life skills and most of all education was very sadly missing.

Growing up all my life without ever being cuddled, or a nice word being said to me.

What a sin the welfare committed, all those children treated like we were cattle throws us a bit of food and put us in the stall for the night, was all they thought we required.

One morning I heard someone on the radio talking about ex state wards, I couldn't believe my ears, grabbing a pen, I copied down

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the information about a meeting at Parramatta. It's been over fifty years since I have come out of the institution; I had never heard one word about state wards.

I was not sure of how I felt, but I knew I had to go, no matter how hard it would be for me to attend.


Reluctantly with my every emotion in turmoil I entered the auditorium, people smiled and greeted me, possibly the look on my face was enough to tell them I was one of them. I had found CLAN.

One elderly gentleman spoke, during his speech he mentioned weevils, a torrent of emotion ripped out of me. I sobbed and sobbed I never cry in public as I don't want sympathy, a lady next to me put her arms around me and whispered "have you been there to" I sobbed even harder then she told me it was her husband on stage.

I joined CLAN on the spot and when I am with these people feel like I have come home. Thank God for CLAN.

There is a lot more details of what happened in these welfare homes, I am sure other people will inform the committee of them, I have great difficulty going back to those times.

Yours sincerely



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