

SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE,

The secretary,

My name in 1938 was Sylvia Cox and I was 8½ years old. That year around the 23/3/38 I was made a Ward of The State in Victoria and admitted to Royal Park Childrens Home. It was a very traumatic experience being locked in an isolation room for the first week. All in one day I had lost my mother, brothers and my freedom. My sister and I cried and cried and cried. The nurses were too busy to sit and comfort, or talk to us. When we heard the key in the lock we were told why we had been locked in the wired in sleepout..

We were left to wonder when our mother was coming for us, as she'd told us we were going on a holiday with her to this place. Each morning we'd be told that our mother would probably come for us that day.

One day I felt inside myself that my mother wasn't coming back ever for us, It felt like a bereavement, The sick hollow feeling in my stomach. The tears that ran down my face when I wasn't crying and soaked my pillow with tears of a night. My sisters constant Crying and and sobbing, and me being ordered by one of the nurses to amuse my sister, to comfort or read to her. I tell you I couldn't look after myself ,I was devastated and heartbroken.

I felt afraid of the unknown, very anxious, nervous, fearful and concerned. All the while I was uneasy and filled with apprehension when the nurses came into wash us or make our beds. For the first few days I couldn't eat. I don't think I'll ever get over it and are always anxious about something. By the time I was a Nervous wreck and had to take anti depressants in my teen years.

When we went to the courthouse a few days after being put in the Home. I saw my brothers, mother, and father. My father was very upset after the courtcase,. For some reason my mother never spoke to us but she was talking to other people, and my brother told me he'd been locked up in a brick room like a jail. There was a slot in the door and his food was passed into him through the slot. Why did this happen, to innocent children like we were.

Before My brother died a couple of years ago he wrote some of his life story about being in Royal Park home about 6 month he was there. He came down with diptheria while there and was sent to Fairfield Infectious diseases hospital.

When My sister and I left Royal Park I never saw my brothers again for about four years. We hardly knew one another, The closeness we shared years before we went to the home was lost. We'd all been through traumatic experiences in our lives. Eventually I found out my brothers had been sent to Minton Boys home Frankston.



When we were allowed to join the other girls in the dormitory, we were told to make our beds every morning, never sit on bedspreads or we'd crush them. We had a bedside cupboard for our personal belongings, which at the time we never had anything. The staff had taken our own clothes away from us. We were wearing government clothing. The girls were busy polishing the wooden floors. Some of the girls were carrying five pound jam tins half filled with a runny polish. With a stick they'd splash small heaps onto the floor. The kids coming behind them on their knees had polishing rags and polished the floor. I know I was made to help out with this. Other girls were dusting the bedside tables, window ledges and anything else that needed dusting. This was a Saturday morning job.

We were then shown where we'd go to school and the dining room. We were told where to put our dirty plates and cutlery when we'd eaten. We were also told there was a roster system, and everyone had a turn at helping with the dishes.

I remember an incident in the dormitory one night that I have remembered all my life. A small girl about four years old was treated very cruelly by a night nurse. A girl in the next bed to the little four year old girl was crying loudly. The nurse asked her what was wrong, (As I was in the bed opposite her I watched and listened when I was supposed to be asleep) The girl said that girl in the bed next to me keeps playing with her private and keeping me awake. The night nurse roughly pulled the blankets off the little girl who was fast asleep and said to her. "ILL fix you you filthy dirty brat. The nurse hurried down the room, took some old sheets from the cupboard. Tore off some long strips and went back to the little girl. She grabbed the little girls hands tied them together and then made this little child put her hands above her head and tied them to the top of the bed. The poor little girl cried and cried. Its cruelty like this that breeds more fear into childrens minds.

I saw another incident in the school class at Royal Park. Two policemen marched a boy about 12 years old into the schoolroom. He'd run away from the home and was being brought back. The school teacher insulted the boy by calling him nasty names, and asked the boy where he went. He said home. The teacher mocked him and said "YOU" go home. Nobody would want you if you did go home. No one likes you boof head. The teacher belted him across the legs backside and back. The boy broke away from him and ran for the door. The teacher caught him at the doorway and dragged the boy back to his desk by the ear. The teacher said Why did you run away. The boy said, this is a cruel place and your the cruelest of them all. The teachers face contorted with rage, as he continued to abuse the boy and the boy answered him back. The teacher then used all his force and forced the boy to half lie on his table. He held

4 Half laid on the boy and said "Do you know what I do with kids like you. I cut their bloody ears off. He held the boy down while he reached around into his trouser pocket. He pulled out a ~~small~~ <sup>pocket</sup> knife. He opened the blade with his teeth and went to cut the boys ear off. The boy was screaming in terror as the lunch bell rang and we were told, this will happen to you if you run away. Then we were dismissed. In my book Ive written a word for word account of this incident.

I have written it here because I felt sorry for the boy, and know one knows the terror I felt as I walked out of the classroom. It took me all my time to walk, my legs were shaking so much. I was still terrified when I had to go back into the class room after lunch. I have wondered all my life what happened to that boy after we left the room. Even a man would have been scared in this situation. I was so pleased when we went away to Kildoen Home at Burwood

I found Kildoen home to be quite homely and friendly, The staff were friendly, and the school teachers there were lovely to us. I wasn't afraid there, although their were rules to be obeyed. The dormitories were nice furnished, and the dining room was always set up with nice table clothes and cutelry. Some of the older girls worked in the laundry and kitchen and waited on us at the tables. there was nothing to complain about the food.

We werethen sent to a Mrs Inghams place at Bendigo. I don't think we could have found a better home. She was a great church woman and lived her religion and we enjoyed going to church with her. She also taught us in a short time about morals and how to behave. She looked after us better than our own mother. We had to leave there when she needed our bedroom for her 96 year old mother who was confined to a wheelchair. He mother went to live with her. I was extremely upset and sad the day we left her, I would gladly have called her my real mother

Then our lives changed for the worst.

We were sent to a woman a Mrs Bramley who had eight Wards of the State in her care ranging in ages from a baby in a pram to three year olds, six year old to my age of nine years.

As Iv'e become older I wonder how this dirty lazy woman came to be in care of us children. We werem't welcome in the house. The verandah, a cellar under the house and the backyard was our home, and we could sleep in the bedroom at night.

In the cold weather we were always cold and hungry. In the hot weather we were hot, half starved, and eaten by bed bugs

We were sent to school with our heads full of lice. There was No effort was made to rid our heads of these filthy creatures. If we arrived home sick from school, or took sick at home, a doctor wasn't called, we were given a large dose of castor oil instead.

An example of this is. One day the school children congregated near the park at Bendigo expecting a visit from the governer. We stood there so long waiting. I saw the ground coming up to hit me, I had fainted, The teachers revived me and sat me on the edge of a gutter. One was kind enough to give me the money for a tram, which was part of the way home.

When I walked into Bramleys house she demanded to know what I was doing home. I told her I'd fainted at school.

She became alarmed and yelled at me. If I have to get a doctor, Its not the work, its not the work. You're not to tell him about the work."

She then told me to lie down and gave me a big dose of castor oil. She said this should fix you up so we don't need a doctor.

I was worked like a slave, washing clothes by hand and copper, washing and scrubbing floors, Looking after toddlers, carrying them around on my hip, dressing and feeding them which I hated because these half fed children were always cold and grissly in the cold weather. I never hated the children I hated the work. There were dishes to wash at night after tea. Back yard to be swept. And the tin dish of water we washed up in would go like pea soup and cold and make your hands itch.

The bed bugs in that house were so bad, that when we took our hats off the posts that held the mirror of the chest of drawers We had to kill the bugs that were always in our hat band before we went to Sunday School. If a mattress was carried outside, the bugs would fall off in hundreds. It makes my flesh creep every time I think about it.

When we left Bramleys to go and live with relatives, still as wards of the State, My Aunt took me to a doctor as I looked ill. He said physically I was on the verge of going into a decline. I was stooped and bent over. If I hadn't been removed from there I probably wouldn't be alive to tell the tale.

My school work started to fail, and yet I was classed as highly intelligent. I felt school was an uncomfortable place to be in and yet when I was younger I always wanted to be a school teacher and was for ever playing school with my imaginary pupils. I did go on to Technical School I definitely wanted an office course typing etc. My mother was waiting for me to leave school when I was fourteen as she needed me to go to work and earn money for her. Actually she was putting me to work that is housework. for other women when I was thirteen. She sure beleived in making us work. Milking cows, feeding poultry, feeding calves, housework, cooking the tea every night after school.

I took a course in typing myself, and a course in short Story writing for about three years. Had I had a good education and a different childhood, I would have gone in for psychology and counselling. But my inferiority complex I developed as a child still beats me as it has done so for many years.

WARD OF THE STATE

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At Bramleys

It was the 27th January 1939 When Mrs Ingham, Dulcie, and myself arrived outside the large stone grey building which housed the office of the Child Welfare Department in Bendigo. Dulcie and I were reluctant to follow Mrs Ingham through the front entrance. It was going to be a hot day but I suddenly shivered from the cold inside the building, or was it from fear of the unknown .

Mrs Ingham walked quickly ahead of us along the wide highly polished corridor and frequently dabbed at her eyes with a white handkerchief.

Suddenly she stopped walking, turned around and told us girls to hurry up and said, "I want both to sit on this long wooden seat and wait patiently until a nice lady comes out of one of those doors to take you home with her to live. Now what ever you do, don't move from this seat, just sit and wait like two nice little ladies. I have to go home now girls she said kindly, and bent down and kissed us goodbye. Her kind eyes overflowed with tears and she was crying as she left us abruptly and hurried towards a solid wooden door. When she reached it she turned and waved, then walked out of the door and out of our lives.

Once again I felt a sick churning in my stomach, and an Uncomfortable lump came in my throat and I was forced to swallow hard to stop my self from crying out loudly. Dulcie sat beside me and sobbed pitifully Yes Quietly and said, " I don't wantta live with another woman. I wantta go home to my mummy'!

"I do too." I said putting my arm around her shoulder. Dulcie sobbed, "Well why doesn't mummy come and get me?" I tried hard to make my sister understand the situation but I was crying myself as I wanted and hoped our mother would come for us instead of a stranger. Instead of telling her how afraid and heartbroken I was, I wiped my little sisters eyes and said "Mummy will come one day, but until she does we will have to stay with this new lady. Now you don't want her to see you crying do you.?"

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At Bramleys

She sniffed loudly trying to regain her composure and said, "NO, I don't want her to see me crying"

"That's a good girl," I said, and sat there holding her hand. Time dragged on as we waited and waited and waited. I was beginning to think that these people had forgotten all about us. I was beginning to wonder what Dulcie and I would do if no one came for us as we felt very alone. Suddenly a door opened right opposite us and I could hear two women talking. Then I felt my body tense. As a plump middle aged lady walked towards us. Her figure was squeezed tightly into a black and purple floral dress. Her greasy black hair was permed and worn short around her fat face. I noticed her dark rimmed spectacles masked her slightly cross eyed eyes as she stood in front of us eyeing us up and down.

She said in an abrupt manner "I'm Mrs Bramley and I'm your new mother so from now on You'll both call me mum."

I looked at Dulcie confounded, then stared at the woman aghast, I immediately felt resentment towards her. My mind screamed with indignation. You're not my mother, I have my own mother, and you're not even pretty like her.

"You look to be the eldest", she said curtly. "You must be Sylvia, and Dulcie is your sister?"

"Yes Mrs Bramley"

"Well take your sisters hand and follow me. You are coming home with me now. Come on girls don't sit there, we've got to get home."

Dulcie clung onto my hand as we hurried along the corridor our footsteps making the only sound on the highly polished floors.

Mrs Bramley's modest home stood on the corner of Quick and Camp St in Iron Bark Bendigo. Across the road STOOD AN OLD unused school because a gold mine was working in the grounds. We walked onto a small verandah porch which had two doors, one opening into a kitchen and one into the main part of the house lounge and four bedrooms.

We stood at the front doors of Mrs Bramley's house waiting to enter the house. Mrs Bramley said to Dulcie and I, "You girls leave your belongings at the door. I want to see what you've brought here. It will take me awhile to unpack your cases."

You girls run off now down the back yard and play with the kids. Feeling bewildered and let down I said,"Mrs Bramley we should change our good clothes or they'll get dirty."

She spoke impatiently," Theres no need,no need at all for you to change your clothes today.It makes too much washing."

I still stood at the door wondering what to do next. Mrs Bramley Said~~being~~ annoyed with us ." Well! what are you waiting for.

Off you go! Off you go."

"Could I have a glass of water please." I asked.

" Not now! Lunch will not be long.You can have a drink then."

I felt tears prick my eyes,I was hot and thirsty.. We turned away from this uncaring woman. I'd never felt so lonely,so lost.

Dulcie and I walked around the corner of the house,we stood still awhile gathering the confidence to meet the children in the back yard.We both cried broken heartedly.

The backyard looked a mess,Old rubbish scattered everywhere a wooden dunny had dirty torn newspaper protruding from underneath the battered door,as it stood there in all its unsightly glory. There were no cats,birds,dogs,or toys to be seen,except for a lonely car tyre made into a swing which was attached by a rope to the branch of a large mumberry tree. At the rear of the yard adjacent to the side gate stood two very old peppercorn trees which gracefully swept the hot dusty ground beneath them with theih soft leafy tips.

We never saw any children in the backyard until we walked to the otherside of the house. We'd just turned the corner,then stopped and stared at a girl about nine years old. She was skinny and pale,her light brown hair looked unkempt,and her faded torn clothes hung on her like dirty rags. She was kneeling on the ground scratching a drawing into the dusty dirt with a thick short stick. She glanced up Quickly ,then jumped to her feet in surprise.She was embarrassed and flabbergasted at the same time."I didn't know more kids were coming here today. Then her bright blue eyeslit up.

and she smiled shyly, "I'm Mary.S Whats your name.?"

I Felt a lot of tension and fear leave meas Dulcie and I approached this friendly girl. I said my name is Sylvia Cox and this is my sister Dulcie. Your mother told us to come down the yard and play with you kids.I hope you don't mindthat your mother has brought us here to live."

"Why should I mind?" said Mary,She spat on the ground with disgust." she's not my mother,"she said with loathing in her voice , " My mother is dead."

" I'm sorry your mother is dead Mary, My mother put us in Royal Park Children"s home."

Mary warmed towards us and said," Gee! Florence, Bruce, and I were in Royal Park too."

When were you in Royal Park?"

"Just before we came here to live. My Dad got very sick and couldn't look after us anymore."

"Dulcie and I went to live at Kildoen , then we were sent to Mrs Inghams place, she was a lovely lady, then we came here today" I said " she couldn"t look after us anymore, she has to look after her very old Mother." Where"s Florence and Bruce now Mary.?"

"Bruce still lives here,he's over at the mine picking up sticks to boil the copper." Florence used to live here until a fortnight ago but that old bitch up in the house sent Florence back to the home. She accused Florence of playing up with boys on the way home from schöol."

" Did she?" I asked.

NO! its all lies. Mrs Bramley used to make Florence do all the work, washing,ironing,scrubbing floors. One day Florence exploded she couldn't take it anymore.She picked up the straw broom and hit Ma Bramley on the shoulder." Mary became very distressed as she told us. She cried very distressed,she loved the elder sister who'd been very good to her and Bruce.

" Do you like it here Mary."

" I hate it here,I hate having to call that Old bitch mum. I hate everything here,I want to go home to Dad."



" Do we have to call Mrs Bramly mum Mary."

" Yes we do. You'll get into trouble if you don't." said Mary.

Just then I noticed a delicate little girl who who was standing quietly behind me listening to everything that was being said.

"Whose she?" Mary i said while pointing at the girl.

"She's Melvis the big pet around here. Bramleys are talking of adopting her."

Melvis blushed and smiled knowingly yet said quietly "I'M not the pet. " She then came and stood next to me and smiled to herself in a self satisfied way. I watched her <sup>AS SHE</sup> sniffed and sniffed her dirty snotty nose then began to pick it and eat it with her grubby hands. Her hair was fine, thin, a mousy brown, lice were crawling where her hair was matted at the back. I stepped back from her and pulled Dulcie with me. I stared at Mary's hair and saw she had a head louse.

I heard Mrs Bramley yell out from the back door. "Your dinners ready you kids, come and get it at once."

Mary started running towards the back door and called out back over her shoulder " Come on you two You'll have to hurry or you'll get no lunch . there won't be any food left."

Dulcie and I ran after her, Up the back steps, through the door and into a trellised in small verandah. I was about to walk to the kitchen door when Mary Yelled at me. " Sylvia don't go in there ,we kids from the home aren't allowed to eat in the kitchen."

"Why not?" I asked mysterfied.

"Because us children from the home have to eat all our meals on this verandah. We are not allowed to eat with the Bramleys."

I felt slighted but resigned myself to the situation and looked around the dirty verandah. A bedroom window faced onto the verandah. and had a small grubby table pushed hard against the window sill. There were no chairs to sit on, only a wooden stool about four feet long was placed at the table. Just inside the back door was a large heap of wood for a wood stove. Spreading across the floor was dirt, bark, gum leaves

A smelley unemptied potty chair stood just inside the kitchen door. While waiting for Mrs Bramley to bring out our lunch I crossed the room and peeped into the dirtiest washhouse I'd ever seen. A well used copper stood up one end of the room and all around the base of it was wet and dry ashes, sticks papers all tangled up in filthy soiled napkins, dirty clothes, papers and rubbish. The sight of it made me screw up my nose in disgust.

Mrs Bramley walked out of the kitchen carrying two plates. One held a mincemeat patty each, the other held stale dry bread about two slices each child. There was a mad grab for the food as soon as Mrs Bramley returned to her kitchen and shut the door.

I couldn't eat, I felt sick to my stomach, food had no appeal. I grabbed two slices of bread and a meat rissole for Dulcie.

I watched astonished as Bruce came tearing into the verandah he pounced on the patties and stuffed two greedily into his starving mouth swallowing the food before he chewed it. These children were very very hungry.

When the meagre meal was finished Mrs Bramley stuck her head out of the kitchen door. She looked releived as she said, "You can all run down the yard and play now, and don't anyone of you come up to the house bothering me. I'm having visitors today. I'll call you when tea is ready. She didn't mean afternoon tea, she meant the evening meal, there was no such thing as morning or afternoon tea for children from the home at Bramleys. Melvis was allowed to stay in the house.

I felt vaguely numb as I walked dejectedly down to the peppercorn trees to be with Dulcie Mary and Bruce. I felt glad to be out of Mrs Bramleys sight. She'd made no conversation with us and she made me feel uneasy.

Do you two kids like Mrs Bramley I asked again, being cautious because I didn't know how they really felt. "I hate it here" said Bruce who was eight years old, "and when I'm old enough I'm going home to my Dad, He's a good man my Dad."

Mary said with a thoughtful frown on her face. "Sylvia Why did Your mother put you in a home. Were you naughty or something?"

" No, My mother and father were arguing all the time. Because of the depression my father couldn't get any work. We had to keep moving house, we didn't have money to buy food. Mum had to get work and one night she didn't come home anymore. She left my father. My father took us to mums mother for a few days and we stayed there until mum put us in a home, or jail as my father called it. It was a very sad time, and is still a very sad time" I said starting to cry.

"Where did your father go," said Mary.

" I don't know but I think he is with Granny Cox my nanny." " I love my father." said Mary "and I feel very sorry for him"

Why Mary." I asked.

"Because Florence found a letter addressed to her in Bramleys letter box when Ma Bramley was out. Florence wouldn't give the letter to Mrs bramley, she didn't even tell her she had it, and she wouldn't show it or it would have been taken off her. Dad said in his letter to Florence that he was a very worried man because Mrs Bramley keeps writing to him demanding he send her more and more money, besides clothes, or she'd be forced to put us back in the home. Dad is far too sick to work and has hardly any money to buy himself food." Mary went quiet and thought for a moment, then said Worridly' " Sylvia I hope Ma Bramley doesn't know where your parents are or she'll be taking all their money off thantoo." Then she burst out crying and sobbed, "I feel sorry for Dad, I feel sorry for Florence, I feel sorry for us, because I miss them all so dreadfully. Why did my mummy have to die."

"Never mind Mary, I said feeling very sorry for her, "I miss my two brothers, my parents too."

"Where's your brothers," she asked with tear filled eyes.

"Still in Royal Park Home I think."

" How come you are here and your brothers are still in there?"

" I don't know. We weren't allowed to say goodbye to them, I Havent seen them since we left Royal Park. I saw Norman once in the school class. Norman and I had a lot of fun together.

After we tired of talking Mary said, " Come and I'll show you the cellar underneath the house. When it gets too hot or is raining we go in there." We walked quickly down a couple of concrete steps into the cellar, It was large and smelt musty but felt cool after the heat outside .Mr Bramley kept all his rabbit traps, sacks, and othār things in the cellar. Mary said, " Wer'e not allowed in here ,come and see where we hide. She showed me some steps in the far corner, hidden by a wall. They led up to door in the floor which wasn't used. Mary said quietly, "If you sit up on the top step You can sometimes hear what Bramleys are talking about up in the house."

About mid-afternoon we saw Melvis sauntering down the yard towards us. "What do you want?" said Mary.

" Nothing! I just came down to tell you mum and I have been unpacking your bags. Mum gave me Sylvia's pencil case ." said Melvis smugly.

I jumped to my feet very angry, and shouted at her., I was ready to take my pencil case by force if necessary. We didn't have any toys, and I'd been given my pencil case by Mrs Ingham for Christmas.

" Give it back I shouted at Melvis, I "M going to need it for school

" Melvis ran back towards the house, yelling out, "Its my pencil case ,my pencil case, Mum gave it to me. I "M going to tell on you."

I sat down and cried my eyes out. I said to Mary, "does that brat get everything around here?"

" NO, No said Mary, but you will lose all your personel things like we did when we first came here. Its very strange I don't know what Ma Bramley does with our toys and clothes, they just disappeared we never saw them again."

At tea time Mrs Bramley carried out of the kitchen another plate of cold mince patties and a plate of dry bread. She almost threw the plates on the table, then without a word she hurried back into the kitchen. I felt very hungry after the plates of food were emptied and said to the kids. I "m going to ask for more. Mary looked at me amazed , "Your not allowed to ask for more food here." Mary Said . Ma Bramley said we should be thankful for what food she gives us."

"But I only had two sausage meat patties and one slice of bread."

Mary looked at me amazed, "Your not allowed to ask for more food here," ~~she~~ said Mary. Ma Bramley said we should be thankful for what food she gives us."

"But I only had two sausage meat patties and one slice of bread.

Mary said, we are always hungry here but you get used to it after a while.

After the meal we sat at the table and on the floor until just before dark. Mrs Bramley came out of the kitchen and told Mary to take us around the house to our bedroom. "Mary said, Come on ,we don't have to wash ourselves of a night here, we wash our face and hands of a morning in a tin dish on the verandah. Once a week we have a bath in the cement trough in the washhouse. before going to Sunday school.

In the bedroom wwere two single beds and one double bed for Dulcie and I. There was one battered looking pink chest of drawers and nothing else. Mary showed us where to find our night clothes and said "Some nights its hard to go to sleep when its hot. There are a lot of bed bugs in the room, they come out in the dark and bite us in bed."

Mrs Bramley poked her head in the bedroom door when we were in bed, she said, I don't want any noise coming from this room, settle down and go to sleep."

Dulcie and I cried a lot that night, but did it silently so as not to disturb anyone in the house.

Next morning after we were dressed and made our bed, we walked around the house to the verandah for breakfast. Melvis came out of the kitchen and put five chipped white enamel bowls and spoons on the table . Mrs Bramley followed her out with a big black boiler which she placed on the end of the table. She dipped a white enamel mug into the pot and then filled the bowls with a strange looking concoction. It was bread crusts floating in water. "Whats that muck." I gasped

"That's sop, Not muck." said Ma Bramley "Eat in now or go hungry." I dipped my spoon into the warm stale crusts floating in the water and gingerly tasted it. I was amazed! It was completely tasteless. YUK! YUK! I'M not going to eat that stuff its got no sugar or milk.

Mrs Bramley was angry and stalked off into the kitchen with out another word.

The other kids never said a word. They had sop every morning and were busy eating it. Mary said YOU"LL get used to it. Its not always as bad as this. Mrs Bramley goes to a baker in Bendigo once a week. She takes a sugar bag. The baker fills the bag with scraps of cake, buns, <sup>bread</sup> and even icing sugar. This makes the sop nice and sweet sometimes, its not always just bread. We never have sugar or milk.

Dinner that day was fried bread with dripping spread on it. Tea was the sausage meat patties and bread again. After a couple of days we were glad to eat what was put in front of us

AS soon as the school holidays were over we started our new school at Voilet St Bendigo. I felt extremely nervous, actually sick in the stomach. The first two weeks started without incident in the classroom. Then my school teacher Mr Howie said, "Why haven't you got your school books yet."

"I havent been given any Sir."

"Alright I'll have to give you a sheet of paper to work on. Please make sure you have your books by next week. I can't afford to hold the class back

I asked Mrs Bramley that night for my school books."

"Don't ask me," she said, ask your teacher, you get all your books free. I'm not paying for them."

After the weekend I went to school without any books.

Mr Howie Shouted at me, "I see you still havent got any books,

"Why not?" Where's your spelling list."

My face was burning hot, I was burn ing up with embarrassment in front of my class mates.

Almost in a whisper I said, "You havent given me any books sir." He pointed his finger at his own chest and said loudly and sarcastically putting on an act, WEll! Well! now!, fancy that now! I havent given you any books yet."

"No Sir", I said feeling more embarrassed, "I was told that I'd get my books free at school."

"Why! Why should you get your books free".

At that moment I wished the floor would open up. I dreaded the other children finding out I was a Ward of the State. I never answered him, I felt the tears pricking my eyes."

"Come on answer me, he roared, JUst don't stand there looking stupid. I asked you why?"

I barely whispered. "Because I'M a WARD of the State." I heard the other children shuffling around in their seats, and saw them eyes staring at me as if I was a curiosity."

Mr Howie roared, "your'e a very silly girl. Why didn't you tell me before. Now go to the headmasters office at once and tell him what youv'e told me."

I was crying as I run to rhe headmasters office and knocked timidly on Mr Sullivan's door. After I told him about my books and Mr Howie.

He said, "Le-ave this me, I'll see Mr Howie .The books are held up in transit. Theyv'e been sent." He then handed me an exercise book to do my work in,

Two days later I was called to the office to collect my books. That is, all except the very important School Paper with the spelling list. I'd always loved school but now I dreaded it. When Friday came I felt free, two whole days away from Mr Howie.

Saturday afternoon I felt ~~so~~ hot and thirsty, I crept up to the small verandah to go to the washhouse and have a drink of water, then I stopped tip toeing abruptly. Mrs Bramley was standing at the washtrough rising out some of her pants.

"I just came in here because I need a drink of water ." I said nervously.

After I had a mug of water, Mrs Bramley said, " Sylvia I've been wanting to talk to you alone. Please call me mum, I wondered if you would like to help me with the washing of the clothes of a Saturday. I would pay you tuppence. I give Bruce tuppence as he helps me with the copper and washing. I do miss Florence, she used to do a lot of work for me, and I used to give her tuppence a week. Would you like tuppence a week.

I thought excitedly tuppence that would buy my school paper. So I agreed to help with the washing.

It was agreed I'd start my work the following Saturday morning.

The next Saturday morning straight after breakfast Bruce went across the road to the old school to get sticks, bark, and gum leaves to boil the copper., while Mrs Bramley showed me what I had to do. "She said put all the napkins in heaps. The poohy ones are to be soaked in these three big preserving pans which she put on the floor, telling me to fill them with dipper fulls of water to three quarters full. Its Bruces job to wash the poohy off them. I picked up some napkins and they stunk after being left in the washhouse for a week. Large maggots fell out of them and crawled across the floor ."Pooh they stink "I said.

"Never mind about that," Said Ma Bramley, Ive filled the copper now, put the napkins ~~which haven't any phsey on them~~ into the water I'll go and get you a cake of soap to grate into the water.

Shortly after she came back with a vegetable grater, and a cake of very hard home-made soap. I stood next to the copper trying to grate the soap. It made my hands ache terribly after Ma Bramley had gone back into the kitchen., and left Bruce and I to do the washing. Bruce stuffed a heap of newspaper bark and sticks under the copper then lit it.

He stood up pulled a knife our of his pocket and gave it to me to cut up the soap as it was too hard to grate. I finally threw



the remainder of the soap into the smelley napkins in the copper.

All of a sudden smoke poured out of every conceivable crack between the copper and the tin stand, and it wasn't long before the room began to fill with smoke, then the grey smoke got thicker and thicker. We could hardly see in front of us. The smoke began stinging my eyes. I started to cough and shouted at Bruce, "We'd better get out of here, my eyes are stinging."

He yelled back, "So are mine." We both were spluttering, and coughing, and rubbing his stinging eyes as we ran out side into the fresh air. Bruce said, "The fire should be burning alright now, but we'll have to wait until the smoke clears before we can go back into the washhouse."

As soon as the smoke cleared, Bruce got busy stoking the copper again while I stood watching him. He said, "Sylvia would you mind helping me wash the poohy napkins? I hate doing it. I have to do this stinking job every Saturday. Florence used to help me, that lazy old bitch inside Won't help us."

I squatted down in front of one of the preserving pans and began washing the pooh of the stinking napkins. It wasn't long before I stood up complaining, "You'd better do this job yourself Bruce, the smell is making me sick. There's maggots swimming around in the water with the pooh, The water is the colour of pea soup,"

Bruce, between putting more wood under the copper, was squatting down at another preserving pan on the floor, and said "Sylvia Please help me."

"No I can't," I said, "I can't stand the stink, its making me sick and my legs are aching from squatting down on the floor."

Bruce was only eight years old but his temper was raging, he grabbed up a stinking napkin full of water from the preserving pan, and slapped it forcefully up and down, so that half the muck landed out on the washhouse floor. Then he threw the napkin with such force at the wall, that some of the filthy water splashed back in his face. He jumped up and down Yelling loudly, "Pooh it stinks, Get me something Get me something to wipe my face,"

I picked up a grubby towel off the floor and handed it to him and helped him clean himself up.

The copper started to boil, I ran to the kitchen door and knocked. Through the doorway I saw Mrs Bramley sitting at the table having her morning tea. Melvis opened the door, and said. Mum's busy."

Mrs Bramley didn't even look around. "What do you want." she said. I said, "The coppers boiling, what do I do now?"

She didn't bother to get up or look around. she said. "I'll be out shortly to show you what to do. Just keep poking the washing down with a copper stick, and watch you don't burn yourself."

I found the broom handle which was the copper stick under a pile of dirty clothes. I started playing with the bubbles in the boiling water, and kept pushing the smelley napkins down into the water. At times the water boiled over the edge of the copper threatening to put the copper fire out, and I felt hot splashes on my legs.

Suddenly the whole copper load bubbled up high, boiling furiously and splashed down with a sizzling sound over the hot metal copper stand, nearly putting the copper fire out.

Bruce yelled at me, "Push the clothes down hard, Push them down harder or I'll have to light the fire again."

"I'm trying, I'M trying, but the water is bubbling too quickly for me to stop it, its already splashing on my legs, its too hot."

Mrs Bramley came into the washhouse and took the copper stick off me and pushed the washing down herself. She said to me, "Put the two plugs in the troughs and half fill them with water."

After I did that, she poked the copper stick back into the copper and loaded it with hot steaming napkins which dripped all over the floor as she carried them about four feet to the trough. She pushed the napkins under the water and then showed me how to use the hand wringer to wring the clothes from one trough to the other. Then to put them in a basket until she was ready to hang them on the line.

Saturday afternoons Mrs Bramley listened to her horse races, and Ted Nickersy or some name like that lived at the school across the road, and came often to Mrs Bramleys. Bruce said, "Ted used to come and go of a Saturday down to the hotel to put on the bets." I said how do you know?" He said, "because one day I followed him and watched him put on the bets."

The washing was very hard work for Bruce and I of a Saturday, sometimes it was late in the afternoons before we finished.. Sometimes we'd be wet through, freezing cold in the winter as as there was no glass in the washhouse window. At times I had to use the washing board to wash socks, and at times I'd rub the skin off my knuckles and they'd sting and bleed.

One afternoon around three oclock, Just as Bruce and I were finishing the washing, I saw from the washhouse window Mr Bramley, arriving home in a small green utility truck. He pulled in at the side gate. I heard Melvis yell out excitedly, "Dads home, Dads home"

Then I saw a tall wiry man, with weather beaten complexion and grubby clothes get out of the truck. He walked around the back of his truck inspecting a load of rabbits that were hanging in pair slung across poles, the truck body appeared full. Mr Bramleys body language showed he was pleased with his catch. He then strode towards the house with Melvis swinging on his arm. I heard Melvis and Mr Bramley walk into the kitchen then shut th door, He stayed in the house awhile then walked back to the truck to get an armful of rabbits and take them up inside the house. Later he drove off again to sell or deliver his rabbits.

After I let the last of the washing water out of the troughs I walked outside. I was wet through. My knuckles were skinned, and I was glad to sit down in the sun near the peppercorn tree. Melvis had been given a small grey kitten at school and wanted to keep it. When she told Mr Bramley he threatened to kill it. Later on that afternoon he did just that bymaking all us children,

watch him as he picked the tiny kitten up by the back legs and smashed its head against one of the peppercorn trees. Then threw it on the ground at our feet and said, "Don't bring cats or dogs home here or they'll all end up the same way." Then he stalked off up to the house leaving us kids to bury the little kitten.

Next morning I felt my heart drop when I saw Bruce stagger into the verandah with a large armful of bark and sticks for the copper. I followed him into the washhouse and said concerned,

"We don't have to do the washing again today do we?"

"NO, NO These sticks are to boil the copper for our bath. We always have a bath on Sunday before we go to Sunday School."

"But where's the bath?"

There's no bath here at Bramleys. We put water in one of the troughs, climb up into the trough and have our bath."

"What time do we go to Sunday School?"

"We usually get a good dinner of a Sunday rabbit and vegs. We leave just after lunch as it takes us a fair while to walk to Sunday School in Bendigo."

Monday morning before school I was clutching my twopence tightly in my hand so I wouldn't lose it, as I walked into the small shop near the school. The shop sold lollies ice cream, school books and most importantly February's school paper with the spelling list inside it.

The friendly man behind the counter asked what I'd like.

I said, The school paper with the spelling list in it.

He looked on the shelf behind him and said, "I'm sorry pet we've run out of them."

"I must have one," I told the man I'm going to get into awful trouble if I go to school without one."

The man double checked his shelf, and said, "Nope Nope, none left."

When I walked into school that morning I was shaking like a leaf. The spelling lesson had started before Mr Howard noticed I had no School paper, He banged his stick on my desk in front of me and said, "How many times have I told you not to come into my class until you get one."

"I don't know Sir."

"I don't know Sir?" Well today...

hear, get out, of here and don't come back until you get one!'

I started to cry. I can't get one Sir there is none left in the shop'."

He grabbed me roughly by the upper arm, "Get out of here you disgust me. The likes of you are not wanted in here."

I was almost thrown out of the room. I felt desperate. I couldn't go home to Bramley's she wouldn't help me. I had no one to turn to for help. I just stood in the corridor and wept. I felt totally unwanted and rejected.

At play time kids passed me in the corridor, many stared at me, but all passed me by. Then two girls from the sixth grade passed me. One of these girls came back, and said kindly "What on earth is the matter. Why on earth are you sobbing like that?"

"Mr Howard won't let me back into the classroom because I have no School paper."

Which School paper."

"The one with the spelling in it."

"You poor darling" she said so kindly, "you wait here and I'll go and get you one. I have two."

She came back a minute or two later and handed me a school paper which was in a school paper cover. "I said, I will never forget you for giving me this paper, I can't thank you enough." and to this day, I can still see the face of that beautiful girl.

When the bell rang I went back into class. I sat down feeling very thankful to the girl who had helped me.

Mr Howard said "What are you doing back in the classroom?"

I said "Mr Howard I have a school paper now, A very kind girl gave me one and told me not to worry anymore."

"Well I hope you appreciate it, and learn your spelling now"

Everyday after that, that year I never got over the fear of Mr Howard. Instead of school being the place I loved, it became the dread of my life.

After Sunday School we walked slowly home to Bramleys, *AFTERWARDS*  
~~we~~ children were sitting around the verandah where we were

forced to eat our meals. ~~All~~ children were talking, when I sensed I was being watched by someone standing behind me. I glanced around to see Mr Bramley standing in the kitchen doorway. He was staring at me with a strange look in his eyes or on his face.

He was a tall wiry man who didn't look the cleanest. He had blue eyes and thin sandy hair and looked middle aged to me.

He pointed a finger at me and said, "You come into the kitchen I want to inspect YOU."

I didn't like being called YOU, And I didn't like the way he said it, it made me feel fearful. This was the first time I'd met Mr Bramley. I stood up slowly, thinking I've never been in the kitchen, I'm not allowed to go in there. I walked slowly to the kitchen door and stood shyly outside it. I could see Mrs Bramley frying food on the wood stove.

Mr Bramley was sitting at the end of a large wooden table pouring himself a glass of beer or stout from a bottle. "Come on here, Come in here when I tell you girl, I told you I want to inspect you." I was naturally shy, but now I felt nervous and embarrassed.

I took three or four steps into the large kitchen and stood there feeling awkward and uncomfortable. Mr Bramley held out his large weather beaten hand towards me and said, "Come here when Your told." He put his hairy arm around my waist and pulled me close into his body. I noticed there was another man in the kitchen drinking with him. "She looks a strong one <sup>he said.</sup> as he felt my flat chest (I was nine years old,) And said to his mate, "There's nothing to worry about there yet". Both men laughed.

I tried to pull myself away from Mr Bramley. He pulled me in closer and held me tightly. he said "Don't try and pull away from me yet. I haven't finished inspecting you yet." He ran his hands down the full length of my arms, then down my shaking legs. "Your'e a very hairy girl aren't you," he pushed me away and said, "now go and stand

In the middle of the floor, over there, where I can get a good look at you."

"Where?" I said near to tears.

"Right there will do, Now lift up your dress and show me your legs",

I never moved, I just stood there and stared at him. Mrs Ingham had taught us never to show our legs to men.

" Mr Bramley roared so loud it startled me. Don't just stand there looking stupid girl. SHOW ME THE TOPS OF YOUR LEGS ."

My face flushed hot with embarrassment, I stood there feeling very alone and afraid.

"You come back here to me, NOW"

I walked haltingly towards him. When I was close enough he grabbed me and pulled my dress <sup>up</sup> over my head so I couldn't see, then he mauled my thighs. He turned me around and around and squeezed my buttocks, then he turned me around and around so he could criticize my body. When he tired of his game he said to the other man who was sitting in the kitchen "She'll be alright in a couple of years."

The man said, "YOUR'E upsetting the kid, She's only a baby, I think I'LL be going." He picked up his hat and walked out.

Mr Bramley pulled my dress down, held me at arms length, looked at my face and burst out laughing. "I didn't mean to upset you girl. Come here and I'LL give you some of my stout.."

"I don't want it," I cried, "I want to go out on the verandah with the other kids."

" You can go when you drink this glass of stout, I've poured for you. You watch me drink this glassful it doesn't taste awful at all."

Somehow I managed to drink the stout. Between gagging and feeling I wanted to vomit,

" See how nice it was" He said and laughed.

"No, it was awful."

Mrs Bramley had finished her cooking and said, "You'd better go out to the other children Sylvia."

I cried and cried when I went back out on the verandah. "I don't like that horrible man, I sobbed.

Sylvia Price

Mr Bramley

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WARD OF the STATE

Mary said, " My sister Florence Didn't like him either."

That night in bed my stomach felt squirmy, I fell asleep and woke up with a stomach upset after a nightmare.

Mr Bramley went back to Shepparton to work. I would say he came home nearly every weekend. While Mrs Bramley found more and more work for me to do.

Such as Mrs Bramley calling me into her bedroom One morning and saying " Sylvia I think you could light the fire for me, and make me a cup of tea, "I'm not feeling well today!" I had a lot of trouble making the fire burn, it kept going out. After I made the cup of tea and took it into her bedroom she said, " I think you" D better stay home from school today and help me <sup>with</sup> the work."

" Get the three toddlers up , take them out into the kitchen and dress them." This was a hard job for me, the children were grissly. I had trouble finding their clothes, and I'd never dressed kids before. I gave Toby, Alan, and Albert, their breakfast which consisted of the stale bread and scraps in the big black boiler, with warm water tipped over it. No child there had milk or sugar In the eighteen months I lived there. Mrs Bramley put a small grey enamel pint size billy on a wire hook on the frontporch each night. <sup>For Milk.</sup> These jobs became permanent because I did the jobs to her liking. Many days I'd have to run the whole way to school to avoid being late.

Occasionally Mrs Bramley went out of a night ,and I was used as a baby sitter for, Albert, Alan, Toby, Melvis, Bruce who was eight, Mary who was nine, My sister Pauline .I used to get very tired waiting for Mrs Bramley to return home so as I could go to bed.

She let me sit in her loungeroom on these occasions and I often fell asleep in the lounge chair. Then One night I woke up with a jerk when I heard quiet footsteps in the passage. I looked up it was Melvis, all the kids were Wards of the State. I was afraid she'd find out Mrs Bramley had gone out. If she started crying and woke the other children I'd be in a pickle.

" So I said sharply, "Go back to bed Melvis."



"I don't want to"

"YOUV'e got to go back to bed.Its late."

She started crying,"MY ear is aching."

"Whats the matter with it?"

" I dunno. I might have put a crayon inside it."

I jumped to my feet feeling my heart pumping hard with fear.

"Come here ," I said,"give me a looke to see if I can see it'"

I inspected the ear I couldn't see a thing. She started crying

loudly, I said,"What did you do,tell me what you did."

She said tear:fully ,"I was playing with a crayon I put it in my ear.  
It went right in."

I began to shake !What was I to do."

I sneaked into the bedroom and woke Bruce.I said quietly,"Youve  
got to get up and help me.Melvis has done something to herself.  
and Mrs Bramley isn't home." I said,"run down to Locketts place  
and ask Birdie to come up here at once.

Birdie Lockett was a friend of Mrs Bramleys so she came at once,  
,When she came inside and I told her the situation she kept saying.  
Jesus Christ! Gee Jesus Christ."Then she grumbled and said,I  
suppose there's nothing for it I'll have to take her to the  
Bendigo Hospital."

After they'd been gone awhile Mrs Bramley came home and was  
surprised to see Bruce up with me.We couldnt tell her quick  
enough about Melvis. "She said to me"You stupid girl.Fancy calling  
in the neighbors."

"I had too Mrs Bramley MELvis was in a lot of pain."

"You didn't have too.You could have waited until I got home."

I sat there feeling guilty for what I had done,while Mrs Bramley  
paced up and down ringing her hands and saying,"I wish they'd hurry up  
I don't even know what is going on,"

Eventually Melvis and Birdie arrived home. Mrs Bramley said,  
"its all Sylvis's fault she"s a naughty girl getting you to come  
here,"

Birdie said, Its not Sylvia"s fault at all,she done the right  
thing,Melvis had a big peice of cryon wedged in her ear. The doctor  
got most of it out. But she has to be taken to the hospital for

a few days so as the doctor can make sure he has all the crayon out of her ear. Wo do you think had to take her to the hospital.? It was me.

At the weekend Mr Bramley was home again. I was in bed fast asleep. Mr Bramley woke me, and frighted me as he was standing in my room in the dark. Sylvia , " he said quietly, "Come out into the lounge room with me, Mrs Bramley has gone out and I'm all alone,"

You gave me afright," I said shaking. "I'm tired I want to go to sleep."

"No your'e not," he said coaxing me, "Come out for a little while. I'll give you a lovely banana."

A banana would be a real treat. I hadn't had a banana in years.

" I'll come and talk to you" I said tiredly.

"Good girl, be quiet so you don't wake the other kids."

I followed him out into the lounge room and sat on a chair.. He said, " Come over here and sit on my knee." Mr Bramley spoke very nicely to me, and said " tell me all about yourself. what did your father do for a living."

" Dad's a master fibrous plasterer, He does all decorative work In houses and theatres. Because of the depression he couldn't get work, he had to go on the Susso. We lived in lots of houses. He put his hand on my knee, I pulled his hand away and pulled down my nightgown, He took no notice and ran his hand up my dress. <sup>NIGHT</sup>

"Dont do That" I said

He ignored me and ran his fingers up the leg of my pants. I shivered, I felt embarrassed, guilty, dirty as he was feeling my private parts. I struggled to get away from him. "Sit still and I won't hurt you" he said " Its nice is'nt it." I gulped, I was very frighteded. I said, "I want to go to bed." He said "He's the banana I promised you , when you eat that you can go back to bed, But don't you dare tell anyone."

That night I had a stomach upset, Id wet the bed, vomited on the floor. I was in a terrible mess when I woke up. I felt so sick I couldn't get out of bed. When I told Mrs Bramley I was sick, She said

"Well you'll have to get up and wash the sheets. Come on now get out of that bed. I sat on the edge of the bed feeling faint and ill. Somehow I managed to pull the sheets off the bed and took them to the washhouse. I remember hanging onto the troughs for support, trying to fight off the giddiness. I turned the cold water onto the sheets. Cold perspiration ran down my face and I had bad cramps in the stomach which kept coming and going. Somehow I put the sheets through the wringer and hung them on the line. I knew I wouldn't be able to go back to bed so I crept into the cellar and laid down on some old bags. I must have slept, I woke up shivering and cold. After awhile I began to feel better. I went to the washhouse, climbed up into the wash trough and washed myself down with cold water. Then I went off to school.

Mr Coutts called me out to the front of the class. "He said, 'you look sick Sylvia.'" I said, "I feel sick." He said what are all those red spots on your face?" I said, "that's where the bugs in my bed bite me." He asked me to show him my legs which I did. He said, "well they've been having a mighty feast of you. Go and sit in the front desk there." The kids started sniggering and poking fun at me. The next day I was called to the headmasters office. The headmaster was kind, and asked me questions, checking up on Bramley's treatment of me. I was too scared to run them down. I could have been put into the home again, or belted by The Bramley's

The next weekend Mr Bramley came home I tried to keep out of his way. As soon as Bruce and I finished the washing, I went down to the cellar, Mr Bramley was in a bad mood. Mrs Bramley had gone out and left him to mind the kids. Two of the toddlers sat on their potty chairs on the verandah. They were grissling, and both had a very red ring on their bottoms for sitting too long on the potty chairs. Mr Bramley said angrily "have you boys done Poohy yet. He told them to stand up, took the belt off his waist and belted both of them around the backside. Saying, "When I tell you to have a poo have a poo."

Sylvia Price

Mr Bramley

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WARD OF THE STATE

I awoke one night and screamed and screamed in terror. Mr Bramley stood in the dark with his hands under the blanket playing with my genitals. "Go away I said, 'I want to go back to sleep",

" I wasn't hurting you was I" he half whispered

"You woke me up", I said accusing him."

"I want you to come out in the lounge with me."

" No I don't want to.

"Yes you do, I have a lovely big banana for you."

"I don't want a banana. I want to go to sleep."

He said crossly, "Stop being such a stupid girl, your'e coming out in the lounge with me."

He carried me out into the lounge and sat me on his knee. he began rubbing my legs then put his hands underneath my night gown and fingured me. It was terribly embarrassing and I had mixed emotions."

I was worried about his rough hands on my skin."

All of a sudden he picked me up and turned me around <sup>to face him</sup> until I straddled his legs. Then he took out his penis and told me to play with it."

I didn't want to, "I want to go to bed," I said alarmed."

He kept pushing at my private with his hard penis, and ordered me to sit still for a minute. He had a strange look on his face and was breathing heavily I squirmed and wriggled trying to get away from him I became scared, He was hurting me, more and more.

Suddenly he relaxed his tight hold on me and said", Hes your banana, you can go back to bed now."

Mr Bramley on

On the next occasion, hurt and frightened me more with sexual abuse, In his attempts to enter me."

One Saturday afternoon Mr Bramley had me sitting on his knee and he had his penis out wanting me to play with it. Mary came into the lounge and saw us. I said to her, Come a sit on Mr Bramleys knee. It ended up with one of us on each knee Playing with his penis.

I don't remember how many times these things happened I only thank God that he was away from home so often.