

Submission to Senate Inquiry from MARIS O'ROURKE and EVELYN HOLTON (written by Maris)

Our father was John Lucas ROBERTSON known as Aussie born December 5, 1914 to Roy Robertson and Nellie Boyd in Kalgoorlie, WA. I found from the birth records that they had another child, Walter, two years later. My father never mentioned him and I don't know if he even knew about him. Maybe he was in care too? I remember my father said that he never knew his mother and that 'she shot through and left us and I was put in an orphanage in Subiaco'. Another time he said he was fostered by a family called Roberts in Perth and that he ran away from there and went to sea when he was about 16. I think he was older when he was fostered – maybe 8 or so. He never spoke much about his childhood so we don't have a lot of information but it was clear he had never been loved – and didn't know how to love- only to possess.

He was a merchant seaman for 10 years until WW2 broke out and he joined the RAF. He was stationed at the Isle of Whithorn at an air sea rescue base which is where he met our mother Margaret Pearl HACKWORTH aged 18, known as Peggy. She got pregnant and they got married. Years later we found out that she already had a 2 year old boy Alistair that Aussie absolutely refused to take on. So he was left behind with his grandmother and then when she died with an uncle and he died when he was 22. All local family contact was cut off when Peggy left. We never knew until recently that we had any family in Scotland. It must have been very hard for her. She said years later that she thought he wouldn't take Alistair as a sort of vengeance because he had been left as a young child and had rationalized it as he had 'got on ok'.

WW2 was still on and Aussie then got sent to the Far East and saw action in India and Burma against the Japanese. Meanwhile the air force billeted us in Dumbarton and various other places. When he returned 4 years later Peggy was pregnant with Allan our brother to someone else. We have never known who and only found this all out later. I imagine Aussie was devastated. She said once that she stayed together for the sake of the children and because she couldn't support herself or us. We had a terrible, tense, uncertain, insecure and sometimes violent childhood, Aussie drank a lot and seemed to hate Allan. It's all obvious now as to why but it wasn't at the time. Aussie was a 'man's man' and had lots of mates - a typical hard-drinking Aussie charmer. She was a quiet Scot with no friends or family. They couldn't have been more different. Neither had the skills to deal with any of it so there were just silences or rows. He thought hard times were 'good for you' and used to say it was a tough world out there and you better get used to it. He used to say 'a good belting hadn't harmed him'. Once he sat Allan on a hot stove and held him there.

Anyway as children do we got on with life. Aussie was still in the forces and we were stationed here and there - lots of good and bad places. Gibraltar was wonderful - we lived right on the beach and could escape quite easily from all the rows at home. I went to the local Convent grammar school and the nuns took me up as a bit of a cause - so I got a real education for the first time. Evelyn and I are close in age and as children and teenagers

were very close. We were always the only person the other one knew when we went to new places. I guess Allan had no-one. We can't remember ever doing anything as a family and had no celebrations like birthdays or Christmas or holidays. Aussie thought education was a waste of time 'you need to get out there and get a job' and 'make your own way in life – no-one will look after you – you have to look after yourself' and so on. So we all left school young - and we all left home as soon as we could - in our teens. I went to Canada - just the first of many places and settled in NZ. Evelyn joined the Air Force, went to France etc. and settled in the USA. Allan joined the Army and went to Malta, UK etc. From then on we had little or no contact with one another until I went to work in the USA in 1995 and Evelyn and I found each other and picked up exactly where we had left off as girls. We tracked Allan down in the UK and went to see him in England in 2000. He is the most damaged I think. A deep well of sadness.

After we left Peggy tried to leave Aussie a number of times apparently but he pursued her and made her life very difficult – she got the sack whenever she got a job as he caused so much havoc at the workplace. Aussie and Peggy moved to NZ in the 1970s. I hadn't seen them since I was a teenager and was very surprised and not enthralled when they came here. But it worked out to some extent. Peggy loved NZ and had a special relationship with Dominic my eldest son. However Aussie did not like him, was jealous of him and we had to arrange meetings when he wasn't around. She and I came to know each other a bit better. She and Aussie still didn't get on. She died of cancer when I was having my youngest son Patrick. We always say she died to get away from Aussie who was very possessive and watched her every move. I remember being so sad and angry when she died - we hadn't talked and now the chance was gone. Aussie burned everything in the house - the neighbour rang after three days and said did we know he had had a bonfire going for three days! By the time we got there every single thing of her was gone. He had even had her dog put down. It was as if she had never been. Evelyn and I have often talked about it because we know she kept everything and many things we didn't know could've been explained I imagine if we could've read old letters, seen photos. Aussie died a couple of years later of emphysema (they both smoked but none of us ever have).

It was all very sad for our parents. Their life circumstances and history and times they were born and lived through all conspired against them really. I don't know what this means for your inquiry but I do know you have to be loved to be able to love and that something early in our father's life deeply damaged him. That flowed on to all of us – especially our brother.