

## **I feel like a dead leaf, flying around, not wanted and nowhere to go.**

You're only the Home's Kid.- This was said to me by my own cousins.

My name is Phyllis Findlay , I was born on 14.9.1927. I went to the Church of England Girls Home at Carlingford on Boxing Day 1937.

I don't remember going there I think I've blocked it out. The home was empty as the children were on holiday to Cronulla. We were two scared little kids. We weren't given any warning; we were going to the Home, because Mum and Dad had separated. Our father wanted to put us in the Home to hide us as well, as we weren't wanted by his family. We were an extra burden.

The Matron took us to Cronulla.

I broke out in sclerosis and the shock of being put out. I was then put into hospital in isolation, my hair was shaved and I had to wear a bonnet.

I remember while I lived at home with Father and mother. My father wouldn't allow me to go to school until my sister turned 5 years old. I was 7 when I started. I found it very hard. I missed out on the basics of education. My father's family wouldn't allow me to mention my mother's name. They disliked her. There was a lot of family pressure, they treated us as nothing and were stand offish to our mother and us girls.

I haven't seen my mother for 62 years.

I found my mother's death certificate in 1999. I went with a friend to the BDM in Sydney and thought I'd put in for mother's death certificate to see if she was still alive. I discovered she had died 10 months before. She was 88 years old. From the death certificate I discovered my mother's second husband 's name and she had another three children 1 boy and 2 girls. I made contact with her husband, Lesley Myers.

He said to me at the first meeting "What took you so long?"

I said I had nothing going for me, in other words no help or information from anyone.

I had always loved my mother since I was little.

Lesley offered me a photo of my mother, but I said No, I'll get it next time. There was to be no next time.

As he told his daughter to tell me not to send any more Christmas cards as he didn't want to know me. He's about 94 years old.

The half siblings have welcomed me into their family and extended families.

I have even been to a family wedding in the space of 3-4 years.

These children always knew about Marjorie and me. My mother would talk about us to these siblings.

**They have also told me my handwriting and mannerisms are just like my mother's. It means everything to me to know that after all these years I am like my mother in looks and ways.**

**It feels great to have siblings because I feel I belong to somebody now, her family.**

It was at that time the man next door made a dolls house for me and for my sister, Marjorie a butcher's shop. I still have the dolls' house. We used to attend Church and Sunday school down the road. Our house and church are still standing. We moved once again, it was depression time, closer to family after some months, my mother became ill and was put into Callan Park with a breakdown, my father took us to see her, she wasn't pleased to see him and started to throw things at him. I still have a little plague which my mother drew

and burnt on wood a picture of Marjorie and myself on wood, she sis this while she was in the asylum at Callan Park. It was sometime after that we were put into Carlo- Church of England Girls Home at Carlingford. Apparently, she was told by the courts not to come near us. She did visit us once at the Home.

**She said she would be back; we waited and waited, but never saw her again.**

We worked hard for little children washing and polishing floors, stomping on blankets in troughs to wash them.

My aunt used to supply me with wool, I use to knit my father socks and sleeveless jumpers, and also I remember knitting myself a red, white and blue jumper. At other times I would make a small needles to knit my doll clothes out of broken wire from the fence. I tried to always keep busy that way I wasn't lonely, a friend of mine now still speaks of when I showed her how to make a small rag dolls, which she still does today for her church.

We use to each season take our beds apart and tease the horse hair mattress and remake, it was dusty and hard on the hands, if it turned out lumpy, there was nothing one could do about, you were stuck with a lump until next time.

Then when we went to school over the road, we'd see goanna about, usually on the wattle trees, they became part of the tree, it wasn't until you went to pick of a lump of gum, you'd jump back with fright, we'd eat the gum. The school was a nice brick building, one classroom for 3 and 4 years, another for 5 and 6.

**I remember my sister, Marjorie who was in a lower class, got the cane, which the teacher broke hitting Marjorie about the legs, she was a defiant child, the teacher wanted to break her and couldn't. She just hit as hard as she could. I wasn't allowed to go near her or console her in anyway.**

I don't remember the teacher's names. We were just as picked on as anyone else. We had a visitor once a month, which I think was resented by all the staff. I never got any further with my schooling than 6<sup>th</sup> class while at the Homes. Guess it was because my father forbid us to be separated, some of my friends went to Carlingford School. When I left Carlo at 13 years to live with my Aunt after my grandmother had died. I was put back into 6<sup>th</sup> class at Artarmon school for 12 months, then onto Willoughby High first year for one year., then out to dressmaking. I was 15.

In wintertime and summer when it rained, we weren't allowed to wear shoes, but used trench coats to cover our heads to keep dry if possible, in the winter our feet and hands were covered in chilblains, it was very painful and hard to keep warm, when allowed we could run hot water onto our feet, but really it made little difference. I also once because I was cold, wouldn't wash my back, when I was found out, one staff made me get under the cold shower while she stood there and watched. I had done it all properly and I had my share of standing in the dim hallway for punishment and canings, for what seemed hours, until staff told me to go to bed, not to make a noise for every one was asleep, including staff.

I had a friend Gwen, (a Big Girl) who would always look after us, she got us dressed nicely, with ribbons in our hair for when we had visitors. She was kind to me; we are still friends 67 years later. We are friendly with a number of girls from Carlo and meet on occasions for lunch or an overnight

**With the deprivation in our lives, it's surprising we're normal.**

We have many people to thank for food, clothing and a roof over our heads, at least we grew up as sisters and still are.

It was September 1939, war approaching, we weren't allowed to listen to the radio much, it was a floor model, on this day we all sat around to listen to the news and heard that war had broken out and we were involved, we didn't realize then how bad or how long it would be. After when I went home to live, I use to help my Aunt make camouflage nets and knit for the army. There used to be little clubs in most homes, where people met and make a day of it.

Also after leaving the Home, some of us used to meet Miss Hazel Newton, the secretary of the Church of England office, she was interested in all the girls. When we became friends to her, she was the loveliest and kindness person you ever met, some of us would visit her in hospital as well. A few years later, she died of cancer in Greenwich Hospital, when she got so sick and couldn't do for herself, I would go and feed her. She used to visit me a lot and helped us get our 2 adopted girls.

**There is so much more I could write, all the little things in between that made life interesting and gave me hope. I had a special spot up a tree, where I was hidden and could think about my father and mother and try and work out why, I loved my Mother and I couldn't be with her and I would cry.**

I hated my Father for what he had done to us, he spent his time living it up, he'd put his burdens way and my mother was forbidden to see us.

March 1938, I met a new friend, her name was Phyllis, and little did we know that dysentery was unfolding and we are still friends 67 years later. Our father's grew up together and married and grew apart. Phyllis and I were born 2 weeks apart, same year and spent the years at Carlo. Phyllis stayed until she was 18 and put to work.

On the Home property along side the school, our garden handyman grew vegetables, when they were ready we spent some time picking peas, beans. I think we ate as many as we out into our buckets; it was a backbreaking job. But just to out in the fresh air was good, also when we had time to ourselves we'd lay on the grass looking for plum puddings, a little green seed I assume, we'd eat it, it was quite sweet, hence we would pass time.

**Also I remember that I packed my small suitcase with some clothing, I was going to run away, where to goodness knows and at night, I just wanted to go home. Matron gave me a lecture, it seemed like hours about how bad I was and selfish.**

About 1936 when we moved from Greenwich to Artarmon, my mother was gone again one day, when we came home from school. No one ever told us anything. ( it wasn't our place to know, just do as you were told). We lived with our Dad for a short time, and then we were shuffled again to live with Grandmother, Aunt and Uncle, they would tell me **"You are only here under sufferance"**

At that time my aunt put me into the brownies, which I loved. I even became a patrol leader. I took pride in my uniform (which was a hand down from my cousin as all things). I was doing fine, when we off to Carlingford next .My father was working then and got himself a flat at Chatswood.

From what I understand he never paid for our up keep and I do wonder if he ever paid for us at Carlingford. I guess not, although he would bring little things on visiting days, but even that faded out. When we left Carlingford I rejoined the girl guides and continued to part of until I retired 60 year of age.

At school I never seem to progress. When I left at 13, I was only in the 6<sup>th</sup> class. I blame my father for this as he would say never separate them, after my grandmother died we went back home to the only person in my life that really loved me "Auntie Phyllis" I had to, I had turned 14 by this time and was put into Willoughby Domestic High for 1 year. I was too young to go to work, the next year I started work, dressmaking. I earned 12/6, paid my aunt 10 shillings board, had to borrow 2 pence to pay for my weekly rail ticket. Father did not pay for our keep. It was a struggle to try and live a normal life, being sent from different members of the family to live with, each one would tell you how lucky you were to have a roof over your head.

**I did not resent anything that happened to me in the Homes, that was just a way of life you except this when you don't have any alternative, nothing good or bad lasts forever, so you just wait for better days.**

People don't realize what some children have to go through, before they can do for themselves, some kids preserve and come out on top; some go under with the strain

. I could not have children of my own, so my husband and I adopted 2 girls, a state ward of 7 years old, 12 years later a baby of 6 weeks. Life was good for some years. It had a purpose to help someone else that had nobody, they both have a chip on their shoulder, it has been tough at times.

Then my husband got sick and because he couldn't understand or take it.

I had a life threatening illness, which came upon me in 1990 I died twice, was in a coma for 2 weeks. I only had a small chance of survival with or without an operation, so my husband, stepsister and daughter Suzanne decided on the op and it has worked, it's been a long 14 years, but have made it, my neurosurgeon said recently I am a miracle for my age. I was born with a malformation, which only showed up when I was 62. Fourteen years later I'm still here.

My husband committed suicide at the Chester Hill Railway Station in 1993, life finished then. I wonder why I'm still here. My youngest daughter needs me badly. God does work in mysterious ways. I count my blessings. This is part of my story; I wouldn't like to do the same again. I have wonderful friends and know some wonderful people. I have been and still am very lucky.

**It's been a stressful life.**

This is only part of my story; now that I have started I could go on and on. It is very stressful to go back over life; perhaps it has done me a lot of good, to talk about hidden things. I'd advise anyone not to go backwards, but forward and to help the needy next generation. There are so many kids out there, who need us, we only know half of what goes on in families, we can only do so much, but if we could get some Government help it would help to make Australia strong.

Friends are the best people in life. I am very grateful for mine.

With Leonie's encouragement and help of whom I am grateful I am hoping my notes will urge someone to listen and help.

Charity begins at home and perhaps someone can read between the lines and know of the lives and know of the anguish and heartache all us children have gone through and live with us all our lives.

**We have so much inside of us that we still can't let go.**

But I look on the bright side, it does pay off.

I would like the Senate Inquiry to understand my past life. I've learnt to live with it and I'll just carry on and make the most of what life gives me.

This childhood is with you all your life.

I support national support services for those that want it.

In order to understand why I have never seen my sister, Marjorie since I was 18 and she was 15. I would like to access to Marjorie's state ward file. But I am denied due to privacy laws.

Why should I need to ask a brother in law 's (whom I have never met) consent in order to read her file? She is deceased and has no children. All I know about Marjorie is she left home at 15 and I heard that she went into Parramatta Girls Home. I never saw her again. I tried to find her myself over the years, finally Gina from the special search service found the death certificate and her husband details. I wrote to him in Victoria and asked him some questions regarding Marjorie, but received no reply and my letters were returned to me.

I am a member of CLAN and have been since 2001, when I heard an ad on 2 CH radio for their first Birthday celebrations!

I look forward to the report of this important Senate Inquiry.

Phyllis Findlay.

One last comment, since telling this story, at first I wanted to keep this submission private, but I have had time to think about it and at 3AM this Wednesday I phoned CLAN and left a message to say I gave permission for this submission to be public. It has certainly lifted a load from me emotionally and physically; I feel I've let go of my story. I now feel free. I've lived with this all my years and I have felt stunted in lots of ways. Now at 77 years my story has been told.